



Elena Shishkova  
Maria Ivanova  
Rossitsa Dimova



# DESTINATION: BULGARIA

Selecta



**Elena Shishkova  
Maria Ivanova  
Rossirtska Dimova**

***DESTINATION:*  
**BULGARIA****



Destination: Bulgaria

Copyright © Елена Шишкова, Мария Иванова, Росица Димова 1998

Всички права запазени за  
СЕЛЕКТА © 1998



**Селекта**

Бургас 8001, п.к. 655  
Тел.: 056 21750, факс: 056 31456  
e-mail: [selvia@bse.bg](mailto:selvia@bse.bg)  
[selecta\\_90@mailexcite.com](mailto:selecta_90@mailexcite.com)

ISBN: 954-8371-49-9

*Contents:*

1. The Geography of Bulgaria	5
2. Population and Religion	9
3. State Bodies	15
4. Sofia	18
5. Bulgaria - A Tourist Land	33
6. Kinds of Tourism	37
7. Bulgarian Spas	41
8. Vitosha	51
9. The Rila Mountains	55
10. Samokov	60
11. The Pirin Mountains	65
12. The Rhodope Mountains	71
13. Bulgarian Customs and Festivals	76
14. Bulgarian Cuisine	81
15. Vine-growing and Wine-production in Bulgaria	86
16. Melnik	91
17. The Black Sea	96
18. Bulgarian Seaside Resorts	99
19. Bourgas	109
20. Nessebar	112
21. Sozopol	121
22. The Strandzha Mountains	124
23. The Early Settlers	126
24. The Thracians	132
25. The Kazanlak Tomb	140
26. The Roman Heritage	143
27. Varna	151
28. The Early Byzantine Heritage	163
29. The First Bulgarian Kingdom	167
30. Madara	178
31. Pliska	178
32. Preslav	183
33. The Second Bulgarian Kingdom	189
34. Veliko Tarnovo	194
35. Arbanasi	205
36. The Stara Planina Mountains	210
37. Medieval Arts and Architecture	213
38. Icons and Icon-painting in Bulgaria	216
39. The Boyana Church	223
40. Rila Monastery	229
41. The Bachkovo Monastery	236
42. The Shipka Pass	240
43. The Valley of Roses	248
44. Koprivshtitsa	254
45. The National Revival in Bulgaria	259
46. Bulgarian Applied Art	266
47. Gabrovo and the Ettar Complex	271
48. Kotel	277
49. Zheravna	280
50. The Plain of Thrace and Plovdiv	285



## **1. The Geography of Bulgaria**

Bulgaria is part of the Balkan Peninsula in south-east Europe. It has common borders with Greece and Turkey to the south, former Yugoslavia to the west and Romania to the north. Its boundary with Romania is the river Danube except in Dobroudzha. The eastern coast of Bulgaria is on the Black Sea which links it directly with the countries of the former Soviet Union and, by way of the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, with the countries bordering on the Mediterranean.

Bulgaria has a total area of 111 000 sq. km. (43 000 sq. miles). Its population is almost 9 million. Both in area and population it is one of the smaller European countries.

Its importance is due mainly to its geographical position at the junction of the main routes which connect Western to Northern Europe with the Middle and Near East.

Bulgaria has a great variety of landscape: high mountains, wooded hills, wide fertile plains and valleys. The Balkan mountains stretch from the Yugoslavian border to the Black Sea. They divide Bulgaria into two parts: North and South Bulgaria. The mountains prevent the north winds from penetrating South Bulgaria, thus making the climate of South Bulgaria milder. They are the longest mountain range in the Balkan Peninsula to which they have given their name. Their highest peak is Mount Botev - 2 376 m (7 795 ft). The mountains were the natural shelter of the Bulgarian insurgents during the time of the Ottoman domination.

The Sredna Gora Mountains (meaning the “Central Mountain”) run parallel to the Balkan Mountains. Their highest peak is Bogdan - 1 604 m (5 263 ft).

The Rila Mountains include the highest peak of the Balkan Peninsula - Mount Moussala - 2 925 m (9 596 ft). The snow-clad mountain tops, dense forests and lakes make Rila Mountains a very beautiful range with an Alpine character.

The Pirin Mountains have preserved their natural wilderness. They are much loved by mountaineers. Their highest peak Vikhren is 2 914 m (9 560 ft).

The mountain called Vitosha is an integral part of the scenery of the Bulgarian capital. It is the favourite place of the citizens of Sofia for hiking and recreation. Vitosha has been declared a National Park.

The Rhodopes are the largest range of mountains in Bulgaria. Their southernmost part extends into Greek territory. Their highest peak is Golyam Perelik - 2 191 m (7 188 ft). The mountains are extremely beautiful and their resorts and spas are visited by a great number of tourists. They are also rich in deposits of non-ferrous metals.

Only the north-eastern part of the Strandzha Mountains is in Bulgaria while the rest lies in Turkey. Between the Danube and the Balkan Mountains lies the rolling Danubian Plane. Together with the flat Plain of Dobroudzha, it is the granary of Bulgaria.

Another large plain is the Plain of Upper Thrace. It lies between the Sredna Gora Mountains and the Rhodopes. There vineyards and orchards alternate with fields of wheat, rice, hemp, cotton and tobacco.

The famous Valley of the Roses lies between the Balkan Mountains and the Sredna Gora Mountains. Its sheltered position is ideal for the cultivation of roses. It is the centre of production of attar of roses.

There are many caves in this country and several of them arouse great interest because of their Stone Age artifacts or simply because of their beauty. Ledenika, Magoura, Bacho Kiro, Saeva Doupka and Snezhanka are electrically lit and open to visitors.

The Danube, which is the common boundary with Romania, is the only navigable river. The Maritsa is the longest Bulgarian river despite the fact that one third of its length is in foreign territory. Most Bulgarian rivers flow into the Aegean Sea.

The climate of Bulgaria is temperate continental with an average temperature over the year of about 12°C (53.6°F). Because of the Balkan Range, the influence of the neighbouring seas and the air currents, which have a north-west direction, Bulgaria can be divided into five climatic regions:

1. North Bulgaria is the region of the temperate continental climate.

2. The central parts of the country and Upper Thrace have an intermediate continental climate.

3. The southern parts of the country have an intermediate Mediterranean climate.

4. The climate in the coastal area is influenced by the Black Sea and it is a little warmer in the south.

5. Ground above 900-1000 m has a mountain climate. Temperatures there vary and depend on many factors.

Mean January temperature in the southern part of Bulgaria is about 1° to 2°C, and in the higher parts of the mountains it is between minus 5 and 8°C. On Mount Moussala the mean January temperature is minus 10°C.

The deep-set lowlands are distinguished by their temperature inversion in winter, and therefore the lowest temperatures in Bulgaria have been recorded in Trun (-38.3°C), Breznik (-34.9°C). They are a little lower than the temperatures on Mount Moussala, so along with the highest peak, these hollows are Bulgaria's "cold poles".

The long hours of sunshine and high summer temperatures are a major natural wealth. In the Upper Thracian Plain the mean annual duration of sunshine is more than 2 300 hours, in the Danubian Plain about 2 200 hours, and on Mount Moussala 1950 hours. Mean July temperatures in the southern part of Bulgaria are about 24 to 25°C, in the Danubian Plain from 22° to 24°C, and in the mountain areas they range from 5° to 15°C.

Along the Black sea coast, due to the influence of the sea, the winter temperatures are higher, and the summer temperatures lower than they are in the Upper Thracian Plain or in the Danubian Plain.

The country has an annual rainfall of over 670 mm. The geographical distribution of the annual rainfall is largely governed by physical features, the mountainous areas having far more rain than the lowlands of the north and the Plain of Upper Thrace. Rain is distributed throughout the year but, on the average, summer is the driest season and spring and autumn - the wettest. Snow falls in winter, especially in the mountainous areas, where the average depth is between 0.5-1 m. The mountains are covered with snow for 3-5 months a year and they attract a large number of tourists and skiers. The coastal strip,

the Upper Thracian and the Strouma Valley, however, have an average snowfall of 2-5 cm and about 20 days of snow cover yearly.

In the Danubian Plain, the Plain of Upper Thrace and Western Bulgaria, westerly and northerly winds are common. In Dobroudzha and the coastal strip northerly winds are frequent, and these are very strong in winter. But in summer the coast is refreshed by sea breezes.

Dry spells in summer are typical and irrigation is necessary then.

## **2. Population and Religion**

Bulgaria has a population of about 9 million. The average density is 80 to the sq. km, and in some parts this figure rises to over 100 to the sq. km. The highest densities are found in the industrial areas, while the mountainous areas are fairly thinly populated. The development of industry has led to a mass migration of rural population to the large cities.

The territory of present-day Bulgaria has been inhabited since ancient times. The Thracians are the earliest recorded population in the eastern half of the Balkan Peninsula. They appeared first in the late 2nd millennium BC. The people who endowed the world with Orpheus and Spartacus possessed an exceptionally original culture at a time when even the Sumerian civilization was at its dawn.

The fertile lands of the Balkan Peninsula attracted a succession of temporary settlers and provoked incessant barbaric incursions. The Ancient Greeks, the Macedonians and the Romans had their colonies here and laid their imprint on the demographic structure of the region.

The Bulgarians of today are also descendants of the Southern Slavs who belonged to the Indo-European language community and settled in the lands to the south of the Danube in large numbers about the 5th and the 6th centuries AD. The slavicization of the Balkans played a definitely catalytic role, causing changes in the social system of Byzantium itself, owing to which the Eastern Roman Empire outlived the Western by a millennium.

The Proto-Bulgarians, a tribe of Turkic origin, appeared on the stage of history in the swirl of the Great Migration of Peoples which began in the second half of the 4th century. They settled at the delta of the Danube in the 7th century, invading the land from the east, from the lands bordering on the Sea of Azov. The union of the proto-Bulgarians in 681 with the Slav tribes in Moesia laid the foundations

of the Slav-Bulgarian state. The Bulgars, who were not very numerous, were soon assimilated by the Slavs giving the new state only its name - Bulgaria - and their military organization. In its long, eventful history the Bulgarian State (one of the smallest) has had its dramatic defeats and triumphant victories, regional problems and cultural achievements.

Bulgaria today is populated by a compact mass of Bulgarians, who form 88 per cent of the population. Women outnumber men by 60 000 and outlive them by five years. Two-thirds of the centenarians, of which Bulgaria has always been proud, are women. Bulgaria is one of the countries with predominantly middle-age population. As heirs to one of Europe's great civilizations, and guardians of the Balkan Christian traditions, the Bulgarians have a keen sense of national identity. The Bulgarian people are friendly, proud and want to be treated as equals.

Despite a proud Slavonic heritage forged through centuries of national struggle, Bulgaria is far from being an ethnically homogeneous state. As well as Gypsies, Vlachs, Armenians and Jews, the country contains about a million Muslims of varying origins - mostly Turk, Tatar and Slav. Bearing in mind that Islam is associated with the Ottoman Empire, under which Bulgarian Christians languished for 500 years, it is not surprising that Bulgaria's Muslims have on occasion been regarded as a threat to national unity and have suffered state repression as a result. Conditions for Bulgaria's Muslims have radically changed for the better since November 1989. Today the heaviest concentrations of Muslims are found near the Turkish border, throughout the Rhodope mountains; north-west of the Balkan Range, on the Black Sea coast and in the Plain of Dobroudzha. The Pomaks, descendants of some 15th century Bulgarians, who renounced Christianity in favour of Islam, today live in compact communities in the western Rhodopes. They have preserved their Muslim religious tradition and mode of life.

Gypsies are the third largest national group, forming nearly 3 per cent of the total population. They came to Bulgaria from India, by way of Persia, Syria and Egypt in the 14th century, together with the Turks, but remained backward in their economic and cultural development.

Other ethnic minorities in Bulgaria include: Armenians (about 24 000), Russians (12 000), Greeks (8 000), Jews (7 000), Tartars (6 000), Rumanians (5 000) and Karakachans - islamicized Gypsies (11 000).

All citizens of Bulgaria, regardless of their nationality, are entitled to equal rights and duties. The ethnic minorities can speak their own languages and keep their traditions, build schools and religious buildings. The Turkish language has been restored into the state educational system recently. Four hours of language schooling was voted by the Parliament on condition it took place outside regular school hours.

Bulgarian people are less religious than most others, but religion is now, as it has always been, an important factor in national life. There is complete religious freedom, and anyone may belong to any religious faith that he chooses or none at all. Most believers in Bulgaria belong to the Eastern Orthodox Christian Church.

Christianity was declared state religion in 865 during the reign of Tzar Boris, after a number of successful diplomatic initiatives on the part of the Bulgarian ruler, which deepened the conflict between Rome and Constantinople on ecclesiastical matters and led to the complete religious cleavage between the East and West in 1054. Taking advantage of the conflict Tzar Boris solved the Bulgarian church question in the most favourable way. He chose the Constantinople Patriarchate which guaranteed the Bulgarian State an independent church head entitled Archbishop. The adoption of Christianity was an exclusively political act whose purpose was to promote Bulgaria to the level of the then advanced countries, to standardize the material culture and religion of the two ethnic components and put the finishing touches to the formation of the Bulgarian nationality. Bulgarian rulers were well aware of the fact that the Orthodox Church could be used as a vehicle for Byzantine interests in Bulgaria. To prevent that, Boris's son Tzar Simeon established a separate Bulgarian Patriarchate, thus ensuring the Bulgars full ecclesiastical autonomy. Bulgarians taught in the Slav language were ordained as priests on a mass scale, the state was covered by bishoprics headed by Bulgarian bishops.

During the reign of Tzar Simeon many religious buildings -

churches and monasteries - were built where the new Christian culture flowered into being. From the very beginning the monastic community was called upon to fight for the establishment of a coherent ethnic structure by joining the Proto-Bulgarian and Slav population to common rites and religious traditions, thus creating and developing an all-Bulgarian culture. The Bulgarian monasteries became centres that preserved the Eastern Orthodox faith, a relatively independent literature and a national sense of cultural-historical identity in times of turmoil.

Though subjected to the strong influence and rivalry of Byzantium, Bulgaria made her own contribution to Christianity. First, by sending missionaries for the Christian conversion of Russia, where in the 11th century Old Bulgarian became the official language of both church and state, and, second, with the Bogomil heresy, which persisted almost 500 years and spread all over Europe: the Cathari in Northern Italy, the Albigenses and Bugari in France.

The Bogomil heresy emerged in the 10th century as a result of the social discontent with the existing feudal order. Its philosophy was based on the dualistic concept that two main principles existed in the Universe - good and evil. The visible world was created and ruled by the Satan and only the spiritual things were good. The movement, led by a priest named Bogomil, rejected the Establishment, the social order and the church as being the embodiment of vice and evil. It taught disobedience to state authorities, feudal lords and the clergy. The Bogomils denied the necessity of the institution of the church and recognized the ability of each individual person to seek self perfection and spiritual salvation. The heretics' views on church dogmas and rites were either critical or full of ridicule. In that respect the Bogomil heresy contained elements of not only an anti-church but also an anti-religious character. The Bogomil ethics were based on the principles of the Gospel: "to observe the evangelical commandments, to pray, to be clean and pure of any vice, not to possess anything, to endure evil, to be humble and to love one another". The Bogomils also rejected the teaching about the "Original sin" and treated men and women on an equal footing. In their religious communities, the women were entrusted with preaching and organizational tasks, and had the right to enter the circle of the "perfect".

The heretics were considered a threat to the state and the church and as such were subjected to cruel persecution.

It has always been a tradition in the autocephalic Orthodox churches to find a modus vivendi and even alliance with the authorities. In this field, Orthodoxy has acquired considerable diplomatic experience. While the priests were supporting the resistance movement against the Ottomans, the Bulgarian upper clergy wheedled a certain tolerance and even support on the part of the Sublime Porte. Throughout the centuries of foreign domain the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, however, remained the symbol of religious and national independence. The last patriarch of the independent kingdom, Euthimius, was venerated for five centuries as the idol of national virtues. The monasteries and churches turned into shrines of culture and in the 19th century into centres of religious revolts. In 1870 the Ottoman government was compelled to recognize the Bulgarian Exarchate, i. e. the independence of the Bulgarian Church, and Exarch Antim I was appointed head of the Bulgarian Church. The Oecumenical Patriarch in Constantinople proclaimed it schismatic. The big schism of Orthodoxy in the 11th century was followed by other “schisms” in the Eastern community, as the Bulgarian case shows. The Ottomans tolerated the Patriarchate of Constantinople, but it was Russia which became the idol of the oppressed churches. If the Monastery on Mt. Athos remained the spiritual centre of Orthodoxy, the Patriarch of Russia increasingly assumed the role of head of all oppressed Christians.

The measures of secularization undertaken by Peter the Great in 1721 had subordinated the Orthodox Church to the Russian State. The example of Peter the Great who granted the Church a synodal regime, was adopted by the Bulgarian, Serbian and Rumanian religious communities. It was intended to lend greater authority to the faithful, ecclesiastic and secular, than to the Patriarchate of Constantinople. That is why when the Bulgarian Church proclaimed its independence in the 19th century, the Patriarch of Constantinople did not accept the separation. The Bulgarian Church was considered schismatic until after WW II when the communist regime took official measures to raise the authority of the autocephalic church. As a result the Oecumenical Patriarch lifted the schism. At a special National Council, to which all

dioceses sent their delegates, the former dignity of the Patriarchate of the Bulgarian Orthodox Church was re-established.

The Bulgarian Church is a member of the World Council of Churches in Geneva. It maintains good relations with the Anglican Church of the United States and of other countries.

The state does not make itself responsible for the physical upkeep of the Church buildings, which has to be paid by voluntary contributions. Similarly, the clergy are not paid by the state, but out of the Church's own funds, supplemented by money from parishioners.

Interest in religion is actually growing up. For the small minority groups it is the thing that keeps them together and keeps their culture alive. For the Bulgarians the Bulgarian Orthodox Church is an expression of their national identity. All public holidays are accompanied by services performed in churches. Television and radio give time for broadcasts of religious services, carefully distributed according to supposed demand. But almost all religious life goes on in a local context - christenings, weddings, funerals. Hardly an event of local significance can go without the blessing of the local priest.

A common sight at churches today are the memorial photographs of the recently deceased relatives stuck into candelabras. This is part of the Orthodox forty-day mourning rite which Bulgarians also observe by putting up posters in the streets.

Since the light of a candle has always been considered symbolic, superstitious or not, it is a routine among the Bulgarians to light a few candles whenever they enter a church. This small gesture is universally accepted as a means of supporting the church and its properties.

### **3. State Bodies**

The state exercises its functions through the work of the various state bodies, which form an integral system based on common organizational principles. These representative bodies form the backbone of the entire state apparatus, aiming at the widest participation of the people in the government of the state.

Bulgaria is a parliamentary republic headed by the President.

The Constitution of the Republic of Bulgaria was adopted by the National Assembly on July 12, 1991. It reflects and sanctions the social, economic and political foundations of the state, the functions and competence of the organs of government, the rights and duties of the people, and the electoral system.

The organs of government are:

*The National Assembly*, the supreme legislative authority of the state. It occupies a special place in the system of the state apparatus, expressing the sovereign will of the people. It directs the main lines of home and foreign policy, votes over the budget, appoints and can replace all other organs of government.

The National Assembly is an elective body, consisting of men and women from all sections of the community. General elections are held every four years and 240 members are elected by universal, equal and direct suffrage, by secret ballot.

As the sole legislative body, the National Assembly lays down the legal regulations for the main areas of public life by passing laws. It grants amnesties, decides the questions of declaring war and concluding peace, elects and dismisses the Council of Ministers, the Supreme Court and Chief Public Prosecutor of Bulgaria, ratifies and cancels international treaties, etc.

*The Council of Ministers* (the Government) is the body of ministers charged for the time being with the administration of national affairs. It consists of chairman, deputies and members. It operates under the guidance of the National Assembly and is accountable to it for all its work. It is responsible for initiating and directing administrative, economic and cultural activities; for public order, national defence and foreign relations. The National Assembly determines the number, the kind and the names of the ministries and other departments having the rank of ministries.

*Local Bodies of Government.* Bulgaria is divided into 9 districts, including the city of Sofia. These administrative units have their locally elected councils which are responsible for public order, economic development and cultural activities in their respective regions. It is essential for the democracy that the local councils gradually assume more of the functions of the central government, its ministries, committees and departments.

*Courts and Public Prosecutors.* The courts and the public prosecutors are entrusted with the task of defending the existing social system, as established and legislatively reaffirmed by the Constitution and the laws and of safeguarding the constitutional rights of the citizens. The Supreme Court and the Chief Public Prosecutor are elected to and dismissed from office by the National Assembly. The judges are independent. They act collectively as a court and apply the laws exactly and uniformly to all citizens. The public prosecutors are directly subordinated to the supreme body of state power - The National Assembly. Their task is to watch over the exact application of the laws. They are independent of the other state bodies.

The Bulgarian Parliament has passed the following laws:

- \* The Law on Property Title and Utilization of Farmland
- \* The Law for Accounting
- \* The Law on Statistics
- \* The Law for the Turnover Tax and Excise Taxes
- \* The Competition Law
- \* The Commercial Law
- \* The Foreign Investment Law
- \* The Banking Law

\* The Restitution Law  
\* The Law for Restructuring and Privatization of State-owned Enterprises

\* The Law for the VAT Tax

The executive organs are the Council of Ministers with the Prime Minister, ministries, committees and agencies (the Agency of Privatization).

## **4. Sofia**

Sofia seems to be a God chosen place, with natural and convenient roads to rivers and seas, to Europe and Asia. The valley is fertile, encircled by mountains among which Vitosha is the gem. The climate is temperate, without sharp temperature fluctuations: the altitude is 550 metres, the summer is not excessively hot, the autumn is dry and fine, the winter is cold and snowy and the spring is usually cool. Natural springs with curative properties abound in Sofia's environs. All this can be seen on the city's coat of arms which is a shield divided into four fields. One of the fields features Julia Domna, the patroness of cities, with her characteristic crown of crenelles. On her right hand side is the old Church of St. Sophia, the capital's oldest church dating to the 4th c. AD, after which the city is supposedly named. On the second row is Mount Vitosha which is as inseparable from Sofia as Vesuvius is from Naples. The last of the fields features a temple of Apollo, the patron of curative waters. The lion is in the middle for it is the coat of arms of Bulgaria's capital. The shield is crowned by mighty towers symbolizing the invincibility of the fortress.

Unlike most European cities, Sofia does not have a big river. Six small rivers - Perlovska, Slatinska, Vladaiska, Boyanska, Suhindolska and Kakach, flow across Sofia.

According to its optimistic motto, Sofia "grows but does not age": a tribute to the endless high-rise suburbs inhabited by one-tenth of the country's population, and a cryptic reference to its ancient origin. From less than 30 000 inhabitants in 1880, the population has grown to 1 150 000 citizens today.

Sofia is the largest political, economic and cultural centre in the country and its capital since 1879. Sofia houses the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences with many research institutes, universities with an enrollment of 65 000 students and a teaching staff of 6 000, 39

museums of which 11 are national, 11 theatres, an opera, an operetta, symphony orchestras and prestigious international festivals.

About one-fifth of the country's total industrial production is concentrated in the capital. Besides the Kremikovtsi Metal Works producing steel, pig iron and rolled iron, which is the largest in the country, there are factories for electrical appliances, tyres, textiles, leather goods, furniture, cigarettes, paper, foodstuffs and medicines.

Sofia city planning is clear and city transport, served by trams, trolley-buses, buses and taxis is easy to cope with. Sofia Airport is the largest in Bulgaria and its scheduled flights connect the country with all major airports in the world.

A popular tourist place with the citizens of Sofia is Mount Vitosha, well-equipped with up-to-date skiing facilities and easily accessible by road or by cabin and chair lifts from the very outskirts of the city. Only an hour's drive is the beautiful mountain resort of Borovets; the Rila Mountains is another favourite place for recreation and sports. Not far from the city are the Pancharevo and Iskar lakes, where there are excellent opportunities for angling, windsurfing and yachting.

Perhaps Sofia is the youngest capital in Europe. It has been the capital city of Bulgaria for more than one hundred years, but actually it lies on the layers of centuries. Constantine the Great, the founder of the Eastern Roman Empire, who called it "my Rome", was hardly aware that the coeval of Troy and Mycenae was older than the Eternal City, and maybe it had been in existence since the 18th Dynasty of Egypt. The earliest records about the inhabitants of Sofia date from the mid-1st millennium BC. Herodotus and Aristotle insisted that it is the oldest city in Europe.

Archaeological finds, objects and vessels, testify that the earliest inhabitants are to be dated to the 7th-8th millennium BC. One of the earliest settlements, a remote forerunner of the modern city, was excavated in the neighbourhood of Sofia. The remains of a large habitation dating to the early Neolithic architecture was unearthed, and it is the biggest such dwelling from this period that has been excavated in Europe so far. Around the 8th-7th centuries BC the site of Sofia was inhabited by a Thracian tribe called Serdi, one of the 22 Thracian tribes, whose first appearance on the Balkans is dated back to the

Bronze Age, a fact which makes historians believe that Bulgaria is one of the cradles of Western civilizations. Sofia's history began with the Thracian name Sardonopolis. In the 5th century BC this area was incorporated into the large Thracian kingdom of the Odrysae.

The Romans invaded and conquered the Balkan Peninsula at the dawn of the Christian era. Like all places that had natural resources and a convenient inland location the town became a Roman city and was given the name Serdica. Soon the small Thracian settlement grew into a solid fort, an important administrative and military strategic centre, a cradle of crafts and trade as it was on a crossroads and a meeting place of peoples and civilizations of the East and the West. In the reign of the Emperor Marcus Ulpius Traianus (98-117 AD) Serdica was a self-governing city with an assembly, a town council and elected magistrates. As a centre of the Roman province of Thrace it bore the honourable title of Ulpia Serdica, after the Emperor's name. The Roman town occupied the central part of present-day Sofia. Remains of its walls, roads and other public buildings have been uncovered by excavations. From the 3rd century AD Serdica was the centre of the province of Inner Dacia. It minted its own bronze and silver coins and reached its prosperity during the reign of Constantine the Great (306-337 AD). After the adoption of the Christian religion, a remarkable construction of churches started in Serdica. In 343 the famous Oecumenical Council was held here. It was attended by 170 bishops from all parts of the Empire who gathered in a big basilica outside the city walls. Owing to its prosperity Serdica was often the object of barbaric raids. In the 5th century AD the town was burnt down by the Huns. During the reign of the Emperor Justinian I (527-565) the town was restored, the fortress walls were strengthened and new towers were built. In the city's vicinity the citizens put up spacious villas, some of which reveal the exquisite taste of their builders.

The well-fortified Danubian frontier of the Empire proved unable to withstand the pressure of the Slav tribes. Around the 7th century they managed to rid themselves of Byzantine domination and got firmly established on the Balkan Peninsula. Slavs settled down in Serdica replacing the Greeks and Romans who had already fled the town. When the Proto-Bulgarians came to the Balkans and together

with the Slavs formed the First Bulgarian State, Serdica remained within the borders of Byzantium. It was only in the year 809 that the Bulgarian Khan Kroum succeeded in seizing the city. It was incorporated to the Bulgarian state, and its name Sredets of Slavonic origin reflected its central location. Sredets grew into a rich and glamorous city. When Preslav, the then capital of the Bulgarian state, fell for a time under Byzantine rule, Sredets became the capital of Bulgaria. In 1018 when the whole of Bulgaria fell to Byzantium, Sredets became Byzantine territory whose name Triaditsa derived from the Greek phrase for Holy Trinity. Under Byzantium the city was again subjected to invasions, plunder and destruction. It was devastated in succession by the Pechenegs, Serbs and Magyars. In 1110 the Crusaders, led by the German Emperor Friedrich Barbarossa, passed through it.

After Bulgaria had regained its independence, Tzar Assen I managed to incorporate the city back into the boundaries of the Second Bulgarian State at the end of the 12th century. A period of 200 prosperous years followed. The city grew in importance and gradually turned into a major economic and cultural centre in mediaeval Bulgaria. The town became known as Sofia sometime in the 14th century, most probably taking its name from the ancient church of St. Sophia which stood on the highest point outside the town and could be seen from afar.

In 1392, after a three-month siege, Sofia gave in to the Ottoman invaders. The Turks left the name but changed everything else. They pulled down the fortress and erased all that had been a sign of urban construction for centuries. Sofia adopted the Oriental urban planning idea and turned into a rambling place. The old streets became narrow and the neighbourhoods became compact, with covered market places and shops which almost adjoined each other. Christian churches were transformed into mosques. For some 400 years Sofia was the provincial capital of Rumelia. Crafts and trade developed until after the Crimean War, when Turkey threw its markets open to cheap western industrial goods. As a result of the incessant imperial wars Sofia lost its administrative significance and was turned into a military camp. Owing to harassment by bandit groups of former Turkish soldiers, the local Bulgarian population suffered severe impoverishment.

The ideas for national independence and identity brought forward in the period of the National Revival encouraged the citizens of Sofia to take an active part in the nationwide movement for enlightenment and education. Special credit should be given to a Bulgarian merchant, Ivan Denkoglu by name, who provided money for schools and scholarships. In Sofia the struggle for independent Bulgarian church ended with the banishment of the Greek bishop. In 1873 Levski, a great Bulgarian revolutionary and ideological leader, was tried and hanged in Sofia by the Turks. During the April Uprising of 1876 the defenceless population of the town suffered most barbarous and inhuman atrocities.

Liberated from the Turks on January 4th, 1878 by the troops of the Russian General Gurko, Sofia was an insignificant town of 11 000 inhabitants of whom half were below the age of 20 and 70 % were illiterate. On the first day after the Liberation there were 3 000 houses, 30 mosques, 7 churches, 2 schools and 16 gallows that had been erected on the previous day by Osman Nuri Pasha to execute the rebellious men. A year later Sofia was proclaimed capital of Bulgaria. The previous royal city, Tarnovo, was a leftover from the Middle Ages when royal cities were built behind high insurmountable fortress walls. The new time demanded convenient roads for large scale trade and international communication. One of the motives to opt in favour of Sofia was the fact that the Bulgarian spirit had been preserved intact during the centuries of Turkish domination, and the city stood as an unconquerable beacon to the age-old quest for Bulgarian independence, freedom and national identity. The local authorities of the newly proclaimed capital faced great difficulties; the European railway had not reached it yet; city transport used horse drawn carts and urban planning was non-existent. The Turkish troops' panic retreat neglected the sentries, the wounded and the sick, but remembered to carry away the street lanterns. The first measures were to supply new lanterns, reinforce the fire brigade and the night sentry and replace the Turkish names of the streets with Bulgarian ones. A new town plan was designed in 1880 and the development of the new capital began. The first industrial enterprises were established. The first telephone call was made in 1884. The first electric bulb lit in the Balkans was lit in Sofia in 1890.

The railway line connecting Western Europe with Constantinople was completed and the capital acquired the features of a modern European city.

## Sights

### *The Church of Saint George*

In the courtyard of the Balkan Sheraton Hotel - in the very heart of the modern city, a visitor can see an impressive group of Roman remains, dominated by the Rotunda of the Church of St. George. It was built in the 2nd and 3rd centuries AD. The original function of the building, however, is not known: it has been identified as a pagan temple, or a mausoleum, or public baths. This last suggestion seemed at one time the likeliest, for a structure resembling a hypocaust was discovered under the building. Recent investigations have, however, shown that this structure was designed merely to protect the building against rising damp. In the reign of Constantine (306-337), who at one time had the idea of making Serdica the capital of the Roman Empire - hence the famous words attributed to him - "Serdica is my Rome", the building which had perhaps hitherto been a pagan temple, was transformed into a church. In the 5th century, probably in 447, the Huns devastated the church, along with all the other buildings in Serdica. In the 6th century the church was rebuilt by Justinian. In the 10th or 11th c. more restoration work was carried out. It was decorated with frescoes, which belong to three different periods (the 11th-12th, the 13th and the 14th-15th centuries). Of these the last group are the finest: the Bulgarian artist, who painted them, was able to portray figures of great dramatic intensity and profound conviction. The figures of flying angels and the portrait of Christ on the dome, which have been preserved to this day, date from the 10th century. A 14th c. monumental frieze with 22 erect figures of prophets, painted right beneath the dome, has also been preserved.

In the interior of the church are four deep niches, symmetrically arranged. The apse, to the east of the nave, is rectangular in shape. On each side of the nave is a lateral aisle with its apse to the east.

In 1469 the relics of Ivan of Rila (St. John of Rila), the patron of

the Rila Monastery, lay in state here on their way from Tarnovo to Rila Monastery.

This building served as a church until the 16th c. when the Ottoman conquerors turned it into a mosque.

The Roman Road is paved with large stone slabs and bordered with kerbs. A drain in the middle and water pipes on both sides run under the stones.

To the east of the Roman Road are the remains of several buildings. The most interesting is a Roman octagonal structure which may have served originally as a temple, and later from the reign of Constantine onwards as a church. The semicircular apse to the east and the rectangular narthex to the west can be easily distinguished. A number of stone slabs with crosses carved in high relief were found here. The sacrificial altars in the corners of the building and also the statues found on the site point to the fact that the building had been initially used as a pagan temple. The octagonal church probably belongs to the same period as the church of St. George.

### *The Church of St. Petka of the Saddlers*

The church remained open for worship throughout the Turkish occupation, thanks to the influence of the powerful saddlers guild, which provided the money for its construction. The church is a small windowless building with a single aisle and a brick vaulted roof; but the bareness of its exterior, in accordance with the restrictions imposed by the Muslim rulers, is more than compensated by the richness of the interior decoration. The frescoes of the third layer, painted after the Liberation, are of meagre interest, but the first and second layers, which date from the 15th and 17th centuries, are outstanding works of art.

### *The Mosque of the Baths*

The Mosque of the baths (Banya Bashi Mosque) was built in 1575 by the famous Turkish architect Hadzhi Mimar Sinan, who designed mosques prolifically and whose best achievements were the mosques “Suleiman the Great” in Istanbul and “Selim” in Adrianople. In the 17th century the Turkish traveller Evlija Chelebi admired its minaret, considering it superior in beauty and delicacy of proportion to

all the other minarets in Sofia. The mosque is also notable for the richness of its interior decoration and the majesty of its dome. Its name comes from the Turkish bath which once stood here. It is one of the very few specimens of Turkish architecture which have survived in Sofia.

### *The Mineral Baths of Sofia*

They were used as far back as Roman times. The water of the spring has a temperature of 46.7°C. It is recommended for diseases of the nervous, motor and digestive systems, and the metabolism. The modern bathhouse is in the style of the Bulgarian National Revival with elements of medieval architecture. It was completed in 1913 to the designs of the architect Momchilov.

### *The Church of Saint Nedelya*

Trams rattle round a paved square in the centre of which rises the church of St. Nedelya. This was the place where the main streets of ancient Serdica crossed. In the first few years after the adoption of Christianity small churches were built here. Their number increased in medieval times. In those days aristocratic families built private chapels, round which monastery schools appeared. Little by little, dwellings began to be built on the site thus forming a densely populated Bulgarian quarter called the Varosh. In this quarter the little church of St. Nedelya existed during the period of the Ottoman rule, only this time it was known as the church of Sveti Kral - the "Blessed King" - on account of the remains of the Serbian monarch, Stefan Urosh, kept here. In the 19th century the St. Nedelya church became a Metropolitan church. The wooden construction of the church was destroyed in 1856 and restored in 1863.

The present church was built after the Liberation to the designs of Pomerantsev, and is similar to all the Russian churches of this period. Here, on 16th April, 1925, took place the bomb attack on Tzar Boris, while he and his cabinet were attending a funeral mass. The bomb killed 123 people but failed to hurt the intended victim. The Communists - whose attempted revolution had been crushed in 1923 - were naturally blamed but denied all responsibility. Leading revolu-

tionary Georgi Dimitrov laid claim to the attack, but the postwar Communist regime tended to ascribe it to “ultra lefties”. After 1925 the building was restored to its present form.

A magnificent wood-carved iconostasis, dating from 1865, has been preserved in the church along with wonderful icons painted by the renowned Bulgarian artist Stanislav Dospevski.

### *The National History Museum*

The National History Museum occupies the former Palace of Justice at the northern end of boulevard Vitosha. The museum is a superbly arranged monument. The archaeological relics on the ground floor cover the history of the Bulgarian lands up until the medieval period, while the first floor concentrates on the politics and culture of Bulgaria's 19th century renaissance.

#### \* Ancient Artefacts

Halls 1-4 contain artefacts left by various Neolithic cultures between the 7th and 3rd millennia BC - including stone goddess figures found near Varna and inscribed with rams, birds, chevrons, labyrinths and other motifs associated with the Great Earth Mother. Pride of place, however, goes to the great gold and silver collections associated with the Thracians, who inhabited the eastern Balkans during the pre-Christian era. Earliest of these is the hoard of golden vessels found near the village of Valchitrun in northern Bulgaria, and thought to date from about 1300 BC. The various cups and goblets appear quite simple and functional, save for one item consisting of three small containers linked by a trident-like handle. Possibly intended for the ceremonial mixing of liquids, this triple-vessel no doubt had ritual significance for the tribal chieftain who owned it.

#### \* The Rogozhen Treasure

Next comes the Rogozhen Treasure, comprising 165 silver vessels unearthed in the village of Rogozhen near Vratsa. This was in all probability a family treasure, accumulated by wealthy nobles of the Triballi tribe somewhere between the years of 500 and 350 BC. The scenes which decorate many of the vessels portray typically Thracian concerns: hunting trips involving a variety of wild beasts, and archetypal goddess figures - one in a chariot drawn by winged horses, another riding a golden headed lioness.

### \* The Panagyurishte Treasure

More sumptuous still is the golden treasure of Panagyurishte, a collection of 8 drinking vessels and one plate made by Greek artisans of the Dardanelles area and imported into Thrace by a wealthy chieftain. Each rhyton is designed in the shape of an animal's head, with mythological scenes shown in relief around the side. One amphora-shaped rhyton features handles in the form of centaurs and a procession of naked warriors round the main body of the vessel.

### \* Bulgarian Treasures

Bas-reliefs, ceramics, silverware and frescoes give some idea of the artistic heights attained during the medieval era, when Pliska, Preslav and Veliko Tarnovo enjoyed their heyday as capitals; pride of place goes to the superb collection of ecclesiastical art (jewellery, frescoes and icons) displayed in halls 12 - 14 upstairs. The National Revival of the 19th century, when progressive Bulgarians struggled for education, civic reforms and, ultimately, independence, giving rise to revolutionaries like Vassil Levski and Hristo Botev, is prominently featured.

The upper floor also exhibits a wonderful collection of 19th century folk costumes (hall 22) and carpets (in the corridor); plus two beautiful and cosy-looking rooms from Bansko and Tryavna, furnished in the National Revival style.

### *The National Art Gallery*

The former royal palace was built on the site of the Ottoman Konak where Levski was tortured prior to his execution. The building was used as a residence by the Governor of Rumelia. The palace was enlarged and reconstructed when Tzar Ferdinand took residence. Today it houses the Bulgarian National Art Gallery, which contains four sections: three of them display paintings showing the development of Bulgarian art in the 19th and 20th century while the fourth contains works by foreign masters. The artistic works that stand out are those which exploit folk styles and motifs: notably Tsanko Lavrenov's pictures of old Plovdiv; the canvases of Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, the more European in inspiration landscapes of Vassil Barakov and many others. The palace houses the Ethnographic Museum with changing exhibitions of folk costumes, embroidery and jewellery.

### *The Russian Church of Saint Nicholas*

The church is a good example of the 17th century Moscow church architecture. Its exuberant exterior of bright yellow tiles, five onion-shaped gilded domes and an emerald spire conceals the dark, candlewax-scented interior. Officially dedicated to St. Nicholas the Blessed, the church was built in 1913 on the orders of a Russian diplomat who was afraid to pray for his soul in Bulgarian churches, which he believed to be schismatic. The frescoes inside were executed in the style of the Novgorod school.

### *The National Assembly*

The building was erected in 1884 and has been reconstructed three times so far. The central block was designed by Yovanovich, a Bulgarian architect who used elements of Renaissance and Baroque styles. In 1890 the rooms now used as offices were added. In 1928 the wing on the northern side which houses the library was built. The session hall for about 320 deputies and 600 spectators is surrounded by a lobby. The National Assembly is the supreme body of the state power and the only legislative body of the Republic of Bulgaria. Members are elected for a period of four years - one deputy for each 25 000 of the population. The National Assembly elects the Prime Minister who is responsible to it.

### *The Monument to the Liberators*

The Monument to the Liberators is one of the most impressive sights in the capital, a magnificent architectural and sculptural masterpiece which combines two artistic elements - a static Renaissance one with dynamic Baroque. The monument was erected as a symbol of gratitude to the Russian people who liberated Bulgaria from the Turks in 1878. The initiative for its construction was taken by the Bulgarian volunteers who took part in the War of Liberation. The site was chosen by a special committee which organized an anonymous competition for the best design. Thirty-one competitors entered for the international competition and the jury awarded the first prize to the Italian sculptor Arnoldo Zocchi.

The monument was unveiled in 1907. The body of the monu-

ment consists of three parts: a middle part with figures and a massive Renaissance cornice. On top, the equestrian bronze statue of "Tzar Liberator" himself, Alexander II of Russia, holding the declaration of war against Turkey in his hand, gives pride of place. Below the horseman, a large bronze group in high relief represents Nike, the goddess of victory, who, with shield and sword in hand, leads the Russian soldiers who are headed forward. On the east side General Skobelev and Grand-Duke Nicholas, both military commanders, ride side by side followed by Bulgarian volunteers. On the west side are General Gurko, whose troops liberated the capital, and Count Ignatiev, the Russian Ambassador to Turkey, again on horseback. At the back, Bulgarian people in traditional wear give the Russians a hearty welcome.

The pedestal is made of polished granite from Vitosha. On three sides of the pedestal there are bronze bas-reliefs showing moments in Bulgaria's Liberation and the establishment of the new state.

South side: the battle of Stara Zagora - the Turks make an attempt to seize the banner of the volunteers.

West side: the Turkish representatives sign their capitulation.

East side: the opening day of the Constituent Assembly in Tarnovo. Among the figures, Duke Dondukov - head of the provisional government, and a number of prominent Bulgarian statesmen and public figures, can be recognized.

All the bronze figures were cast in Italy. In front the inscription reads: "To our brothers - liberators - from grateful Bulgaria".

### *The Church of Saint Sophia*

It is one of the most famous and most evocative buildings in Sofia, a silent witness of the long, eventful history of the town. The Church of St. Sophia is represented in the coat of arms of the city, which took its name from the saint towards the end of the fourteenth century. The church was built in the 6th century, in the reign of the Emperor Justinian. Excavations carried out at the beginning of the 20th century showed that there had been two smaller and older churches on the site, one dating from the 4th and the other from the 5th century, which were probably destroyed during the barbarian invasions. A few fragments of mosaic flooring decorated with geometric patterns have

been preserved to this day. The church was reconstructed during the First Bulgarian Kingdom when some of the windows were reduced in size and others were completely blocked up. Between the 12th and the 14th century it became the metropolitan church of Sofia. Finally, in the 16th century the church was converted into a mosque by the Turks. The frescoes which the church possessed at that time were erased for ever. Two earthquakes early in the 19th century damaged the mosque, and the Turks, regarding it as a bad omen, ceased to use it. At the time of the Liberation St. Sofia was in a deplorable state of dilapidation, and at one stage was used as a storehouse for explosives, later as a fire station. The church was restored and opened for worship again in 1930.

The Church of St. Sophia is an early example of a three-aisled cruciform domed basilica. Its architecture derives from the art of Asia Minor and Byzantium, but already shows Romanesque features. The influence of Byzantium can be seen in its plan, a cross with arms of equal length inscribed in a square, and in the position of the dome at the intersection of the arms of the cross. St. Sophia resembles the basilicas of Asia Minor in such features as the absence of lateral apses, the continuation of the side aisles towards the narthex, and the grouping of the windows. And finally the vaulting has the round arches characteristic of the Romanesque style. St. Sophia is thus, in a sense, a building which marks a transition between East and West.

The building as a whole conveys the impression of a style of architecture which is still unpolished and primitive, with no concern for elegance. But the very simplicity of the forms and the economical way in which they are used in association with one another, give the whole structure a sturdy solidity which makes St. Sophia a masterpiece of functional architecture.

### *The Alexander Nevski Cathedral*

This is one of the most magnificent achievements of modern architecture in the whole Balkan Peninsula. It was built to commemorate “the glorious deed of the Liberation, along with the blood of the liberated peoples” - in the words used by Petko Karavelov in addressing the Constituent Assembly in 1879. There was long debate about the most suitable place for the monument, but finally the new capital was

chosen in preference to the Shipka Pass or the summit of Tzarevets Hill, which had also been suggested. The cathedral is built on the highest point of Sofia, on the site of the ancient necropolis of Serdica.

The construction of this cathedral is an expression of gratitude to the Russian people who lost nearly 200 000 soldiers and officers in the war that liberated Bulgaria in 1877-78. That is why the cathedral bears the name of Alexander Nevski, patron saint of the liberating Tzar Alexander II. Alexander Nevski was a prince of Novgorod (1200-63) who saved his country by defeating the Swedes on the river Neva (hence his title of Nevski) in 1240. Later he defeated the Knights of the Teutonic Order and stopped their advance. In 1262 he went to the Tartars on a diplomatic mission because they had threatened the northern principalities of Russia. On his return he fell ill, took holy orders and died in the following year. He was later canonized by the Russian Church.

Although the first stone was laid in 1882, the actual construction dragged on for many years. It was designed by Prof. Pomerantsev from Imperial Academy of Fine Arts in St. Petersburg. The church was built in the style of the “North Russian Empire”. Financed by public subscription, the main part of the building was erected between 1904 and 1912, and the church was consecrated in the course of solemn ceremonies on the 12th to 14th September 1924. In 1953 it was raised to the status of a patriarchal cathedral, and in 1955 it was declared an ancient monument. In 1960 the domes were regilded, a task which required no less than 18 pounds of gold leaf donated by the ex-Soviet Union. The two marble tablets, on either side of the main entrance tell us about these events.

The church is a three-aisled basilica dominated by a huge dome and a number of small domes, some of them gilded. The building occupies an area of 3800 sq. yards, with a maximum length of 245 feet and a maximum width of 180 feet. The principal dome stands 170 feet above the ground. Above the narthex is the belfry with 12 bells cast in Moscow. The biggest bell weighs 12 tons and can be heard at a distance of 20 miles. On the front wall is a mosaic icon of St. Alexander Nevski, patron saint of the church.

The cathedral building resembles Byzantine basilicas, with

Renaissance, Russian and Oriental elements. Note particularly the carving of the marble of the iconostasis and the thrones, the columns of which are of alabaster and onyx from Brazil. The suspensions are in the Byzantine style. The internal area of the cathedral is 1300 sq. yards, and it can accommodate a congregation of 5000. The green panels along the walls are of simulated marble made in Berlin. The mosaic icons and floor, designed by Bulgarian and Russian artists, were made in Italy and Germany. The chandeliers, candlesticks and church lamps were made in Munich. The wrought-iron frames of the windows were made in Hanover, the doors were made of oak, specially dried in the shade for 17 years. The central iconostasis is devoted to Russia, the left one to all Slav countries, and the right one to Bulgaria.

The 82 icons and 273 murals are the work of 49 painters (32 Russian, 16 Bulgarian and one Czech - Mrkvicka. The frescoes lack the stiffness of Byzantine painting and depict the life of Christ along with biblical scenes in rich tones and grandeur.

The Crypt of the church was originally intended for tombs of eminent Bulgarian statesmen and public figures but was never used for that purpose. Since 1965 it has housed the Museum of Ancient and Medieval Art. The best icons and murals of 12th - 19th c. are displayed there.

## **5. Bulgaria - A Tourist Land**

Geographically and climatically Bulgaria is well situated to receive tourists and well endowed with tourist assets. Everywhere the climate is temperate and agreeable, with long, hot, dry summers and - in the interior at least - cold winters. Climatic conditions enabled the country to develop seaside, mountain and spa tourism.

About two fifths of Bulgaria's land area is made up of plateaus and hilly terrain, the rest being divided equally between lowland and the mountains. The richness, variety and beauty of her scenery make Bulgaria one of the most attractive tourist destinations in Europe.

The Black Sea coastline in the east extends for 380 km. The beaches cover 34 per cent of the seashore along the coast and are among the best in Europe. In some parts the fine-grained golden sands, which are rich in salts and have different remedial properties form lovely dunes. The sea water, rich in oxygen, with few sea weeds, has no prickly, poisonous or predatory fishes. The climate is also most favourable for holiday making. In the month of October, for example, the sea waters are as warm as the waters of the Baltic Sea in July. At the same geographical latitude the Bulgarian shores are warmer than the Atlantic ones, and a little cooler than the Mediterranean resorts, which is yet another advantage.

Bulgaria boasts a number of majestic mountains whose inexhaustible potentials for the development of tourism have not yet been explored to the full. The Rila, Pirin and Rhodope mountain ranges provide some of the finest highland scenery in Europe. In any season they are simply fascinating with their dizzy heights, rugged slopes, boundless vistas, limpid high mountain lakes, age-old pine forests and crystal clear fresh air. Snow is thick on the ground from late November through to mid-March and guarantees excellent conditions for skiers. In the summer the mountains are thronged with climbers and nature-lovers.

Bulgarian lands also abound in mineral springs whose waters are notable for their curative properties, suitable for successful spa treatment and recreation.

Resorts in Bulgaria have existed since ancient times. The Thracians and ancient Greeks made wide use of the country's mineral waters. The Roman emperors developed spa resorts as means of maintaining the physical health of their legions, and ruins of Roman baths are to be found in many parts of Bulgaria. In more recent times, several mountain resorts, including the present day resorts of Borovets and Pamporovo, existed prior to the Second World War. These resorts were used almost exclusively by Bulgarian residents, mainly the aristocracy including the Bulgarian royal family, and the number of international tourists was insignificant at this time. The foundations of international tourism, in the modern sense, were laid in 1948, when the Balkantourist State Enterprise for Travel and Tourism was set up and given the task of organizing and facilitating the growth of tourism. Although the first hotels had been built in the resort of Constantine and Helena, the construction of the main Black Sea resorts of Golden Sands and Sunny Beach were not completed until the late 1950s. Scrublands and swamps were transformed into large recreational complexes of hotels, restaurants and other tourist facilities.

More recently, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the emphasis switched from mass beach tourism towards cultural tourism, business and conference tourism, and spa and mountain tourism, with special attention to the development of the ski resorts. All leading mountain resorts like Borovets, Malyovitsa, Bansko, Vitosha and Pamporovo were equipped with modern skiing facilities and excellent accommodation. Some of these resorts have now earned for themselves the reputation of first class skiing resorts, hosting international skiing events. The resorts are easily accessible connected by convenient roads with the major airports in the country.

The traditional beach resort holiday still predominates in Bulgaria: almost 60 per cent of the accommodation facilities are located at the seaside. Although package tours based at resorts like Golden Sands, Albena and Sunny Beach present a popular way of getting to Bulgaria, they tend to isolate the tourist from Bulgarian life and cul-

ture. Small peninsula settlements like Nessebar and Sozopol provide a more relaxing fishing-village atmosphere. Private enterprise is more developed here than anywhere else in the country - ensuring a plentiful supply of private rooms and good seafood restaurants. The self-contained holiday villages, which include Rousalka in the north and Eleni and Dyuni in the south, are a comparatively new tourist development attractive to families with children.

Bulgaria also has many cultural attractions to offer the foreign tourist. Sofia, for example, is the second oldest capital in Europe. The second biggest city Plovdiv is home to the finest collection of 19th century architecture in the Balkans. Both cities are increasingly cosmopolitan and offer good opportunities for entertainment. They each form important cultural centres well endowed with museums and galleries, and are good bases from which to visit the rest of the interior. Throughout the country there are numerous museums and monuments worth seeing. Churches and monasteries have been restored as tourist attractions - the Rila monastery for one is featured extensively in excursion programmes. A number of old towns have been preserved as examples of Bulgarian National Revival architecture. The mediaeval capital of Bulgaria is another major tourist attraction. The remains from the past are an integral part of the present-day townscape of this remarkable city, situated amphitheatrically in the picturesque gorge of the Yantra River in the Central Balkan Range.

A great many archaeological monuments from different epochs have been excavated in Bulgaria. The Thracians left their beehive tombs and collections of fine pottery, silver, gold and metalware; the Ancient Greeks and the Romans - remains of their cities with monumental buildings and sculptures, coins and objects of every day life. Numerous remains of Old Bulgarian towns - fortresses, palaces, church buildings and bridges attest to the high standards of Bulgarian architecture. This vast historical heritage is preserved in 168 museums throughout the country and attracts visitors from all over the world.

A trip through Bulgaria reveals many natural beauty spots. Among them a special place is held by Belogradchik Rocks - a quaint town of rocks on the outskirts of Belogradchik; the Stone Forest - a tiny sand desert to the west of Varna, dotted with strange stone trunks;

the Rock Bridges in Smolyan district; Sreburna Lake - the Eldorado of marsh fowls near Silistra; the Valley of Roses and so on.

There are hundreds of caves which zealously guard the treasures of the unknown underground world in which Nature has for centuries chiselled splendid stalagmites and stalactites, spacious halls, galleries, wonderful little lakes and waterfalls and fearful abysses. Some of the best known, most beautiful and most frequented caves in Bulgaria are the Magoura Cave, notable for its rock drawings, Ledenika, Bacho Kiro, Snezhanka and many others.

Tours of the country are extremely popular with Bulgarian citizens and represent a considerable branch of domestic tourism.

The other tourist market currently expanding is that of health and spa tourism owing to the favourable mild climate in the densely wooded mountain resorts and the abundance of mineral springs throughout the country. A large number of rest homes have been constructed, frequented mainly by Bulgarian holiday makers. An excellent health centre has recently been developed at Sandanski in the Pirin mountains for use by international tourists.

## **6. Kinds Of Tourism**

Bulgaria's presence in world culture is generally acclaimed. People the world over have been thrilled by the voice of the late Boris Christoff and a whole host of other brilliant singers. Choral ensembles are winning prizes in prestigious contests, philharmonic orchestras and chamber music ensembles are causing standing ovations, virtuoso soloists and folk singers with incredible voices are stunning audiences both at home and abroad. A growing number of people come to Bulgaria to attend cultural events. The Sofia Weeks of Music, the March Days of Music in Rousse, the Varna Summer International Festival of Music, the International Piano and Ballet Dance Competition in Varna, the Koprivshtitsa Folk Fest - those are just a few of the numerous events which figure on the Bulgarian cultural calendar. Visits to Bulgaria for tourists taking special interest in such events are regularly organized. Their programmes include meetings with prominent artists, study courses at which leading Bulgarian pedagogues and men of arts help trainees improve their skills in a chosen field.

Study tours are very popular. Seminars and courses focusing on Bulgarian folk dances, performing on Bulgarian folk instruments, learning the secrets of traditional Bulgarian crafts and arts such as carpet weaving, pottery, wood-carving, embroidery and other crafts attract a steady flow of enthusiasts. After having mastered a new skill in Bulgaria some of the participants in these courses organize schools and courses in their own countries, where they teach Bulgarian folk art.

Bulgaria offers all the necessary conditions for untraditional rural holiday: dozens of picturesque large and small settlements; fine old houses and traditional lifestyle; adjoining yards with domestic animals and gardens; ecologically clean regions and pastoral landscape; well-organized welcome and services for the guests with typical

Bulgarian hospitality and traditional cuisine. Farming tours, featuring fruit-growing, market-gardening, stock-breeding, tobacco and vinegrowing and other farming activities, are constantly offered by Bulgarian tourist agencies. Considerable experience has been accumulated in arranging tours intended to acquaint the participants with Bulgaria's achievements in other sectors of the national economy.

These days lots of people expect more from a visit to a foreign country than just sunshine and beaches - "Special Interest" is the new travel theme, and Bulgaria really does cater for a surprising number of individual tastes and interests. The country is a real discovery for those who take an interest in gastronomy, ornithology and photography. The "Wine and Dine" Tour of Bulgaria highlights the country's delicious cuisine in a delightful way and winetasting is superb. The culinary courses not only provide instruction on how to cook Bulgarian dishes but also ensure an insight knowledge of Bulgarian mode of life.

Bulgaria's territory affords good opportunities for game-shooting and angling. Lovers of trophy hunting can find their luck at well-stocked hunting farms and water basins. Those who go in for the livelier shooting of small game - pheasant, hare, partridge, wild duck and the like, can spend memorable hours in the shooting areas. The numerous tourist sights and splendid seaside and mountain holiday resorts offer each game-shooter the wonderful opportunity of combining a pleasant holiday with excellent shooting.

There are also very good conditions for angling and fishing provided by the numerous rivers, lakes and the Black Sea. Angling along the Danube and the Black Sea coast is free, and amateur anglers pay no fees. In all other places throughout the country a special permit is required.

Bulgaria is a popular destination for the business world since it offers all the necessary facilities for congresses, symposia, conferences, bilateral and international meetings. Business contacts are also easily combined with recreation and entertainment in the capital and the country's resorts. Modernly equipped meeting facilities, top service and special business programmes are available to guests. Possibilities for organizing business forums with international partic-

pation are offered in the first class hotels Sheraton, Vitosha Summit International, Rodina, Park Hotel Moskva and Novotel Evropa in Sofia; Novotel Plovdiv, St. Petersburg and Trimontium in Plovdiv, Hotel Cherno More in Varna, Hotel Bulgaria in Bourgas, Grand Hotel Varna at St. Constantine resort, Hotel Dobroudzha at Albena resort and many other hotels.

Remarkable for its architectural, artistic and functional merits, the Congress Centre at the National Palace of Culture in Sofia is up to the most sophisticated international standards. The membership in the prestigious International Congress and Convention Association of Congress Palaces (AIPC) serves as a guarantee for the high quality of services. It contains 16 halls seating 100 to 4 000 people, total capacity of 8 600 seats, 15 000 sq. m. exhibition area, audio-visual equipment, simultaneous translation system, fully equipped press-centre, offset printing and photocopying facilities, restaurants and bars, shopping centres and a parking lot.

Other facilities particularly suitable for large-scale international forums are the Palace of Culture and Sports and the Festival Complex in Varna. Experienced staff caters for the smooth running and efficiency of every event.

More recently, another business travel phenomenon has appeared in the shape of incentive tourism. This is travel given by firms to employees, or to dealers and distributors as a reward for some special endeavor or as a spur to achievement. It is estimated that more than four million business people benefit yearly from incentive offers. Special package tours cater for the needs of the business world.

Numerous travel agents all over the world package or put together tours. The typical package tour consists of an inexpensive two-week holiday. It usually has a resort hotel as its destination and offers transport, accommodation, and transfer to and from the airport. In addition to the basic features, the tour may also offer meals, entertainment, sightseeing, and many other extras.

The dense network of sports facilities covering the territory of the country offers excellent conditions for sports tours. Guests from abroad are provided with experienced coaches speaking foreign languages. Tourists of all ages are encouraged to enroll at the schools and

courses specializing in the teaching of ski, tennis, horse-riding and aquatic sports. Training camps are organized for gymnasts, football and volleyball players, etc.

## 7. Bulgarian Spas

Since early antiquity Bulgaria has been famous for its wealth of mineral water whose preventive and curative properties have been highly valued. Furthermore, Bulgaria ranks among the first countries in the world for the abundance of natural mineral springs. One hundred and forty mineral water fields are known to exist in its territory, where there are nearly 600 mineral springs possessing various chemical compounds, temperature and curative properties. Most of these springs have been known since ancient times. The Romans built large cities and spas near the fields at Hissar, Bankya, Sofia, Sapareva Banya, Bourgas, Kyustendil, etc.

The largest number of mineral springs have been found in the Balkan Range, the Sredna Gora Mountains, Rila, Pirin, the Rhodopes, Vitosha, Lyulin, and along the Black Sea coast.

These mineral springs fall into 3 groups, according to their temperature:

- cool or cold springs with temperatures up to 20°C (Yambol, 15.4°C, Breznik, 13.5°C);
- tepid or hypothermal with temperatures from 20 to 36°C (Vurshets, 32.6°C, Bankya, Knyazhevo, 21.5°C, etc.);

- hot or hyperthermal springs with temperature over 36°C. This group includes about 80 per cent of all mineral springs in the country, most of which are in Rila, Pirin and the Rhodopes. The hottest one is at Sapareva Banya - 102°C, then comes the spring at the village of Varvara in Pazardzhik district - 93°C, Velingrad - 78°C, Kyustendil - 74.6°C and Sandanski - 62°C.

Also, there are 33 radioactive mineral springs in Bulgaria, the most radioactive one being Solenoto Izvorche spring at Narechen, which is 12th in the world for radioactivity.

The great variety of natural curative waters, combined with holidaymaking, take up a growing share of the Bulgarian tourist industry. There are well-arranged spas near most of the mineral springs that offer mineral water, climatic treatment, mud and lye cures, herbal treatment, electric and light treatment, massage, remedial exercises, fruit cure, physiotherapy and diet therapy.

It is important to note that besides their dominant chemical characteristics, most of the mineral waters contain biologically active elements and compounds such as fluorine and meta-silicic acid, which recent studies have shown to have important health properties.

Every year a number of visitors from all over the world come to restore and improve their health at our spas in the country's interior or along the Black Sea coast.

One of the most popular spas is in SANDANSKI. The town is situated in the southern part of Bulgaria at the foot of Pirin mountains, 120 km southwest of Sofia. Its mild Mediterranean climate makes it an international health resort. The air contains no allergenic aerosols, there are no fogs, the relative air humidity is very low. This Bulgarian town, at an altitude of 224 m above sea level, has an average annual temperature of about 14°C, with the highest sunshine duration of 2 436 hours a year.

The town has been famous since ancient times. During the second millennium BC there was a Thracian settlement on this site. The town reached the highest point in its development under the Romans. Remains of that period have been preserved up to this day. Historians and archaeologists presume that the region was the birthplace of Spartacus, the leader of the insurgent Roman gladiators. An impressive monument to the legendary rebel leader now dominates the entrance to the modern city of Sandanski, which has kept one of the best preserved remains of the past that can still be seen along the streets.

The town is named after Yane Sandanski, another legendary freedom-fighter. The local people have inherited his free, bold spirit.

Sandanski is rich in mineral springs. The silico-fluoric waters have a low alkaline reaction. The temperature of the mineral waters ranges between 40 and 82°C, with a mineral content between 0.63 and 0.67 grams per litre, and a flow rate of 1 500 litres per minute. These

waters cure gastric, intestinal and metabolic diseases, as well as degenerative diseases of the joints and skin. They are also successfully used for non-specific diseases. Thanks to its climate, the town is also known as a resort especially suitable for the treatment of bronchial asthma. So far not a single case of bronchial asthma has been registered among local people.

In the beautiful park on the edge of the town, on the banks of the Sandanska Bistritsa River, the largest hotel in Bulgaria has been built by the Austrian firm Unuversale to a design by the Bulgarian architect Nenko Nenkov. The Sandanski Hotel is in the four-star category and has a total capacity of 598 beds. It has a large restaurant and another on a covered terrace. There are banquet rooms and a breakfast room. In addition, there is a night and day-bar, a mineral-water bar, a cafe, a snack bar, a bar in the medical department, and a small bar serving the swimming people. The hydro, one of the best in Europe, satisfies the need for modern spa-treatment facilities. The balneological section offers numerous water cures, inhalations, electrotherapy, paraffin therapy, massages, electropuncture, gymnastics, and the services of several doctors, consultation rooms, one dentist, an X-ray room and a room for herbal cures. The therapy centre is intended mainly for the cure of chronic bronchitis and diseases of the upper bronchial tubes. It is also used to treat cardiovascular diseases, as well as disorders of the locomotor system.

There are superb conditions for sports at the Sandanski Hydro: an indoor swimming pool filled with mineral water, and an outdoor pool where the water temperature is maintained at 32°C so that it can be used all the year round, a tennis court, an archery range, and a bowling alley. In the hotel's neighbourhood there is a lake with pedalos to hire. Visitors are invited to join various hiking excursions in the beautiful Pirin mountains.

HISSAR is another famous Bulgarian spa, situated 42 km south of Plovdiv, amid the sunny southern slopes of the Sredna Gora mountains, at an altitude of 360 m above sea level. Its climate is transitionally continental. There are 20 mineral springs with a total flow of 4 000 litres a minute, and temperatures ranging from 37° to 51°C.

The curative properties of its mineral waters have been known

since remote Antiquity, but the spa attained its real height when the Romans came to these lands in the 2nd c. AD. Being aware of its strategic position on the road from Philippopolis to the Danube, they erected a rectangular wall 12 m high and 2-3 m thick with 40 towers to guard the spa against the barbarians' raids. The Patrons of the town in those days were the Three Nymphs. Hissar's ancient name, Diocletianopolis, was given by Emperor Diocletian, who drove away the invading Goths and rebuilt the settlement, surrounding it with an 8-metre thick wall which still stands in part. The Northern Gate, called The Camels, has also been preserved. Archaeological digs carried out so far indicate that there were large Roman baths only at the two springs of Momina Banya and Havouza, which still exist. Data and the latter spring show that this was a huge Roman building, faced with marble and warmed by an installation of hot mineral water. Many ancient tombs have been found in its surroundings as well.

After the city had twice been destroyed by the barbarians, it continued to exist as a small village. Later, in the 15th century, some of the Roman baths were restored, and the springs were also used by the Turks. After the Liberation of Bulgaria in 1878 from Ottoman yoke, Hissar gradually regained its fame as a valued resort, without losing the charm of what was left from Roman times. Many rest houses and spacious sanatoria were built among the lilac trees and cypresses during the past decades. A modern polyclinic and a swimming pool with warm mineral water have been opened alongside several pavilions where the mineral water is drunk. Every year more than 100 000 people get medical attention here. Their condition is improved with the help of the two groups of mineral springs here: the eastern group, with its main spring Momina Banya, has the highest radioactivity, and is recommended for diseases of liver, stomach and intestine. Other springs in the western group, including Havouza, are recommended for gynecological conditions, sterility, diseases of the peritoneum, as well as skin diseases, nervous disorders, arthritis and bone diseases.

The range of the curative properties of the waters here is wide because of their contents - they are slightly mineralized, hyperthermal, hydrocarbonate-natrium, with a partial content of sulphates, fluorine, and various micro-elements.

Once frequented by the aristocracy of the Roman Empire, the spa is now visited by thousands of people all the year round to improve their health.

On either bank of the Bansko River, the town of KYUSTENDIL, with its fertile plain and thermal springs, has attracted conquerors since Thracian times. It is situated 87 km southwest of Sofia, at the foot of the northern slopes of Ossogovo Mountain at an altitude of 530 m above sea level. Its climate is transitionally continental with a marked Mediterranean influence. There are 40 mineral springs with an average flow of 4 000 litres a minute and a temperature of up to 75°C. Being aware of the curative properties of their waters, the Romans developed this into the “town of baths”, and the Turks who settled here in large numbers after the 14th century constructed the hamams and mosques that gave Kyustendil its oriental character. Near the gallery you can see the overgrown brick dome of a small Turkish bath.

The weakly alkaline mineral waters are rich in sulphates, sulphides, hydrocarbonates, sodium, fluorine and silica. The spa is famous for the excellent results in the treatment of sterility and gynaecological conditions, diseases of the peripheral nervous system, skin and chronic inflammatory diseases, and degenerative disorders of the joints as well as the heavy-metal poisoning that is an occupational disease for certain miners.

Accommodation is provided at the 3-star Velbuzhd and the 2-star Pautalia hotels, while treatment is carried out at the resort modern polyclinic.

The spa of VELINGRAD is situated 49 km away from the town of Pazardzhik in the slopes of the Rhodope Mountains at an altitude of 760 m above sea level. Its moderately continental climate is characterized by mild winters and pleasantly cool summers thanks to the Mediterranean influence. There is an abundance of mineral springs, more than 70, with a total flow of 9 000 litres per minute. Their temperatures range from 37° to 90°C. These hyperthermal mineral waters contain hydrocarbonates, sodium sulphate, fluorine and silicate compounds, and are indicated for the treatment of inflammatory and allergic conditions of the lungs and respiratory tract, chronic inflammatory

and degenerative conditions of the joints, disorders of the reproductive system, diseases of the peripheral nervous system and functional conditions of the nervous system, orthopaedic conditions and traumas, and diseases of the locomotor system. You can stay at the local rest homes and sanatoria or at the 2-star Zdravets (Crane's Bill) Hotel. Treatments are administered at the spa clinic.

NARECHEN is another famous spa, situated in the country's southern part, 44 km from Plovdiv, at an altitude of 620 m, with a moderately continental climate. Its mineral waters are hypo- and hyper-thermal with a high radioactive gas content, especially the water of the spring called Solenoto Izvorche which has one of the highest radioactive levels in the world. All these factors make the spa a perfect place for the treatment of functional disorders of the central nervous system, nervous and mental fatigue, cardiovascular diseases, disorders of the metabolism and the endocrine system: diabetes and obesity.

You can take care of your health here staying at the sanatoria and rest homes as well as at the Zarenitsa Hotel, while your treatment will be carried out at the spa clinic.

DEVIN is another spa favourable for climatic cure due to its location in the Rhodope Mountains at an altitude of 710 m among wooded slopes 45 km from Smolyan. It has a mild mountain climate, crystal-clear air and curative mineral springs. Their waters are hyper-thermal with temperature up to 76°C and contain hydrocarbonate, sodium, sulphate, calcium, silicon and fluorine compounds. That is why they are ideal for the treatment of chronic inflammatory and degenerative conditions of the locomotor system, disorders of the peripheral nervous system, diseases of the stomach and intestines and urological conditions, climatic cure of some allergic and skin diseases, as well as chronic lung diseases. Accommodation here is provided at rest homes and sanatoria or at the Grebenets Hotel, and the patients are treated at the town's large hydrotherapy clinic.

The spa of VURSHETS is situated in the western part of the Balkan Range at an altitude of 393 m above sea level, 100 km from Sofia. It has a moderately continental climate. The waters of the mineral spring that are to be found here are hypothermal with general mineralization of 196.6 mg./l. or homothermal (with temperatures of the

human body 36-37°C). They contain hydrocarbonate, sodium sulphate and nitrates. This spa is suitable for the treatment of functional conditions of the central nervous system, cardiovascular diseases, endocrine disorders and disturbances of the metabolism. Accommodation is available at the 2-star Zdravets Hotel and the nearby rest homes and sanatorium. Treatment is administered at the latter and at the resort polyclinic.

The balneologic potential of the Black Sea resorts is also of great importance. With respect to their climate, they occupy an intermediary position between the cool seaside resorts in the north of Europe and the hot Mediterranean resorts. Even during the colder part of the year, the weather along the coast is much better than over the rest of the country. The total duration of sunshine from November to April ranges from 650 to 700 hours. The seaside is unsurpassed for pure air rich in salts and with a high ionine, bromine and ozone content which has a beneficial effect on the physical condition of the people. Together with the medicinal mud and lye along the coast they are important factors in the development of seaside health tourism treatment in Bulgaria.

THE DOBROUDZHA HOTEL in Albena is the largest hydrotherapy complex in Bulgaria. It offers a favourable combination of warm sea climate, thermal springs and firth mud, enabling the resort to work the year round. The mineral waters are hypothermal (24°C), contain hydrocarbonate, sodium, magnesium, etc. The hotel health department is equipped with the latest in medical and spa-treatment technology and can handle as many as 2 000 manipulations a day, indicated for the treatment of disturbances of the peripheral nervous system, functional nervous diseases, some skin diseases and disturbances of the reproductive system. A number of new treatment methods are applied here, including beeswax, propolis, honey and even bee venom; phytotherapy, offering 20 different kinds of medicinal teas, peat treatment, and medical cosmetology. There is a modern polyclinic which also offers modern balneo and climatic treatment.

GOLDEN SANDS is situated 17 km north of Varna and 9 km from the resort of St. Constantine. Its beach is 4 km long and at places up to 100 m wide. The climate is mild: summer is moderately hot; the

mean summer temperature of the air is 27°C, and of the sea water - 24°C. The mineral springs here have water temperature of about 30°C and a wide range of curative properties. The curative mineral waters and the superb conditions for holidaymaking and medical treatment attract many visitors. Located right at the beach, on the fringe of a large thick forest, the International four-star Hotel is one of the oldest spa-treatment centres in Bulgaria, which has won a number of international awards such as the World Tourism Oscar, the honorary diplomas and the Golden Trophy of the Spanish publishing house Oroverde. The health centre here is equipped with modern electro-medical and spa-treatment apparatuses. It has an indoor mineral-water swimming pool, a hydrotherapy department, facilities for electro- and luminotherapy, medical massage, paraffin treatment, kinesitherapy and other manipulations. The treatment is prescribed by specialist physicians and carried out by highly qualified medical staff. Treatment at the International is recommended for chronic diseases of the locomotor system and traumas, functional nervous disorders, cardiovascular diseases in their early stages, diseases of the respiratory tract. The patients are treated with highly effective curative techniques such as phytotherapy, laser-beam acupuncture and an original Bulgarian method for treatment of disturbed sexual functions in men. The health centre is open the year round and can handle up to 1 500 medical manipulations a day.

The Ambassador Hotel also has a health centre which can service 500 patients and handle 1 500 treatments a day. Its hydrotherapy block is equipped with facilities for electro and light therapy, paraffin baths and applications, a fitness hall, a massage room, a mud-treatment department, a kinesitherapy gymnasium. The health centre here is suitable for the treatment of diseases of the locomotor and the peripheral nervous system, diseases of the cardiovascular and nervous system. It also offers holiday, prevention and treatment programmes, such as hydrotherapy, mud therapy, anti-stress programmes, rejuvenation courses, beauty treatment programmes, etc.

The world-famous resort of St. Constantine is situated 10 km northeast of Varna. It also has a specific sea climate influenced by the nearby mountains and forests. Air temperatures in summer range from

22 to 23°C, water temperature - 20-24°C. The constant sea breeze contributes to greater ionization of the air with a predominance of negative ions. The air along the coast is clean, rich in ultra-violet rays, salts, iodine, bromine and ozone. The beach strip covered with fine, clean quartz sand and protected from the north winds can be fully utilized during all sunny days from May until mid-October.

The Varna Grand Hotel here is perhaps the most stylish one along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Together with its catering establishments and various facilities, its modern health department makes it one of the best hotel complexes of its kind in Europe. The thermal mineral water is located 200 m from the hotel, with a depth of 1.84 m. It is hyperthermal, with a temperature of 42°C. The water is slightly mineralized and contains sulphur compounds, hydrocarbonate, chloride, sodium, calcium, magnesium and uncombined hydrogen sulphide. One of the swimming pools here is filled with this water, while the other one is filled with heated sea water, which is rich in mineral substances and vitamins A, B, D, K, C. The large health department is equipped with modern facilities for physical therapy, underwater massage, electric and light treatment, paraffin applications, curative massage and remedial exercises, manual therapy, inhalations, solariums, saunas, and different kinds of curative tubs. This health centre is suitable for the treatment of the locomotor system, disturbances of the nervous system, diseases of the cardiovascular system, chronic and non-specific conditions of the respiratory tract. Diseases of the first and second group are treated throughout the year. Cardiovascular diseases are best treated during the cold months, respiratory conditions in summer. Visitors are offered slimming courses, anti-stress, longevity and body-building programmes, treatment of psychogenically determined male impotence using an original Bulgarian method with the Bulgarian preparation NIVALIN, etc.

SUNNY BEACH offers relatively modest but intensively and effectively used health facilities. The resort tries to make greater use of hydrotherapy the year round. There are two main balneologic centres: The Globus Hotel, which offers facilities for physical therapy, a sauna, and a swimming pool, and The Bourgas Hotel, which has facilities for physical therapy, consulting physicians, and a swimming pool. Both of

them include curative massage, water treatment, inhalations, paraffin tubs, manual therapy, etc, indicated for the treatment of chronic disturbances of the locomotor system, disorders of the peripheral nervous system, cardiovascular diseases, diseases of the blood, chronic non-specific conditions of the lungs and the upper respiratory tract. The local resort polyclinic also offers different manipulations.

POMORIE, or ancient Anchialo, is a town known as a resort to the first Thracians settled in our lands. Later, somewhere around the year 409 BC, an ancient Greek colony was built on the site of the Thracian settlement, probably because of the salt lake, divided from the sea by high sand banks, containing curative mud. The ancients called it the Sacred Lake.

In the early Middle Ages, the resort was known to the Byzantine Emperor Justinian the Great (6th century AD), while from the 14th to the 19th century it was also used by the Sultans of the Ottoman Empire.

The first mud treatment centre, which has been reconstructed several times, was built in 1921-22 after the curative mud discovered in 1905 had been studied by Professor Stoyanov. A modern mud treatment centre was built in 1970. It includes a polyclinic with departments for mud and sea water treatment, special laboratories, a sanatorium, a diet kitchen, etc. Mud treatment has been a year-round procedure since 1973.

Here, the following diseases can be treated: diseases of the locomotor system, of the genitals, inflammatory and hormonal troubles in women, of the peripheral nervous system, etc. Up to 2 400 treatments of different kinds can be given every day. Accommodation is provided at the Pomorie Spa Hotel and treatment is carried out at the spa clinic and its first mud and lye cure wards in the vicinity of the hotel.

The sun shines here 2 379 hours a year, the sea is shallow and safe. Besides, there is a large band of vineyards, orchards and market gardens near the town, which makes it possible to offer fruit treatment until late in the autumn.

## **8. Vitosha**

The dome-shaped massif of Mount Vitosha rises majestically approximately in the middle of South-Western Bulgaria. Its foothills have been inhabited for 7 000 years. Between the 1st and the 4th centuries A.D. the Romans built numerous fortresses on the mountain, which were later rebuilt and used by Byzantines and Bulgarians. About forty monasteries were built there in the Middle Ages. Only two of them (Dragalevski and Kladneshki) have survived to this day.

The capital of Bulgaria, Sofia, is situated in the north of Vitosha, which gives the city its scenic beauty. It is for this reason that the mountain is represented on the coat of arms of Sofia. Vitosha provides the Bulgarian capital with drinking water and offers wonderful places for recreation and sport. Vitosha and Sofia are surrounded by a wreath of other mountains, the biggest among them being the Balkan Range to the north and Rila and Pirin to the south.

According to many sources, the ancient name of Vitosha was Scombros: 2 400 years ago Aristotle himself called it by that name, which supposedly came from the Thracian tribe of Scombrae who inhabited the surrounding area. Its present name - Vitosha (of Old Bulgarian origin) is first found in writings dating from the 13th century. It means a two-peaked, twin-ridged mountain. The main ridge of the mountain runs from the north-west to the south-east. Vitosha is 20 km long and 18 km wide, covering a total area of 278 sq. km. Around are the highest plains in Bulgaria: the Samokov Plain (950 m), the Pernik Plain (750 m) and the Sofia Plain (550 m). There are ten peaks over 2 000 m. The highest peak, called Cherni Vrukh (meaning "Black Peak") is 2 290 m above sea level. Vitosha has a soft, rounded shape. Its northern slopes, descending towards Sofia, are steeper than the southern ones.

The mountain has acquired its present shape in stages. Its core

is made of siennite plutonium, while most of its rock substance is magnetite. Iron and even gold were mined here in earlier times. Scientists still argue whether or not Vitosha was covered with glaciers during the Ice Age. The peculiar stone rivers - eight in number - give rise to such speculations. The most famous of the "stone rivers" is the one in the Zlatnite Mostove (Golden Bridges) locality. This is a curious natural phenomenon which represents a stream of large round boulders, known as the "moraines". The boulders are the nuclei of rocks which have been washed away and rounded by weather, and tumbled down into the river bed. There are similar formations in some other places in Vitosha. Gold-washing was formerly practised here: hence the name of Golden Bridges.

Vitosha is extremely rich in water. A multitude of springs, brooks, creeks and peat bogs give water to nine rivers, the longest of which is the Strouma, which winds its way towards the Aegean Sea. Vitosha is famous for its mineral springs, some of which are of world renown. Particularly healthy are the waters at Gorna Banya, Knyazhevo, Ovcha Koupel and Pancharevo.

Vitosha belongs to the moderate-continental European climatic subzone. While the average annual temperature in Sofia is 10°C, at Aleko, Vitosha's major tourist attraction, located at 1 810 m above sea level, the temperature is 3.3°C, and at Cherni Vrukh - 0.2°C.

Precipitation is considerable: an average of 76 rainy and 117 snowy days annually. Snowfalls begin as early as October. In the low-mountain zone the winter lasts four months, while in the Alpine zone it lasts six months. May and June are the雨iest and August and September are the driest months in Vitosha.

Vitosha is also rich in plant species - about 2 700 of them: oaks, beeches, hornbeams, maples and sycamores, birches and lime-trees, apple, plum and pear trees; various conifers, grasses and shrubs. Numerous animal species adorn the mountain landscape: 114 kinds of birds, over 200 moths, 41 kinds of ants, etc. Deer and does roam the Vitosha meadows; one can see squirrels or an occasional wild hare. Game hunting is strictly forbidden.

Vitosha became a tourist attraction at the end of the 19th century. In 1895 Aleko Konstantinov, a well-known lawyer, writer and pub-

lic figure, established the Bulgarian Tourist Society. He led the first group of enthusiastic hikers to Cherni Vruk - a climb, which marked the beginning of alpine pursuits in Bulgaria. Vitosha was declared a National Park in 1934.

During the last twenty years the mountain has been further developed for recreation and sports. A number of huts, holiday houses, hotels and eating places were built. New roads were laid out, cable cars and chair-lifts were installed. Every day the mountain is visited by thousands of tourists.

The modern, well-furnished tourist and sports centre Aleko is the most recent tourist development in Vitosha. Originally there was a mountain hut on this site which bore the name of Aleko, the first name of the founder of the Bulgarian Tourist Society. The hut was later rebuilt and enlarged several times and now offers accommodation for 230 and a restaurant seating 300. The largest building, however, is the hotel "Shtastlivetsa" (Aleko Konstantinov's pen name, meaning "the happy man"). It has accommodation for 250, a large restaurant and a number of conference rooms and coffee lounges. Complex Aleko also includes the Morenite Hotel, the Prostor Hotel and a number of holiday houses and mountain huts. The hotels are located right next to each other at 1 600-1 800 m above sea level. In the neighbourhood is one of the major ski centres in Vitosha, Stenata (the Wall), which comprises a multitude of easy, medium and very difficult ski-runs. Hikers and skiers have at their disposal three chair-lifts with a total capacity of 2 800 persons per hour. In addition 5 ski-drags with a total length of 4 500 m and a capacity of 3 600 persons per hour take skiers to the top of the hill.

Skiing gear may be hired from any of the ski rentals. Those willing to deposit their own gear for safekeeping may also do so there. Balkantourist runs a highly reputed ski-school which offers expert guidance to every novice wishing to take a quick course and learn to ski with ease. Courses are held in five languages.

The Aleko ski-centre has 6 pistes homologated by the International Ski Federation for international ski competitions. Vitosha offers conditions for practising all Alpine events and cross-country ski races. There ski kindergartens and schools for children are also organized.

Around the end of March and the first week of April there's a competition for the Aleko Cup, with slalom and giant slalom races open to all. Qualifying heats for the European Cup may also take place here at the beginning of March.

Night-life centres around the restaurants, discos and bars of the two main hotels (the Prostor also has a pool and a sauna), and there is a carnival arranged for skiers with Balkan Holidays.

The resort is a forty-minute drive from Sofia, which is the greatest tourist attraction in and around Vitosha.

## 9. The Rila Mountains

South of Sofia, Mount Vitosha gives way with barely a pause to the Rila Mountains, an area of wild highlands enclosing fertile valleys. The Balkan mountains are the longest, the Rhodopes the widest, but Rila is the highest mountain on the Balkan peninsula. Its highest peak - Moussala (literally meaning near to God) reaches 2 925 m above sea level. Here the wind velocity is often over 40 m/s and the snow cover, up to 2 m thick, remains until the end of June. It is the coldest spot in this country.

Philip of Macedon was attracted by the beauty of its rocky pinnacles and its forested slopes some 2400 years ago. The historian Livius (181 BC) records that this king conquered the mountain Dounax (the Thracian name of Rila). "Before his eyes stretched beautiful sights - dense forests, lush meadows, blue lakes and swift streams of sparkling clear water". Dounax, Dounka, Roula - these are all different Thracian names with one sole meaning - much water. From them originates the Slav name - Rila.

Compared to Pirin and the Rhodopes, the rocky heart of Rila is comprised of siliceous material. Despite its complex geological history the composition of the main rock can be summarized as follows: crystalline schists, granites and granito-gneiss. These formed during the Paleozoic Era. The existing alpine landscape was formed considerably later. Once the Rila mountains were covered with glaciers, which have left about 180 lakes sparkling blue among the green meadows and the rocky screes. The "Ice Lake" is at 2 780 m height in the foothill of the Moussala peak is worthy of its name. The largest lake, one of the Fish Lakes, was called the "Stinking One" because during one very dry year the lake volume strongly diminished and the mountain smelt of rotting fish. The deepest (37.5 m) is the lake called "The Eye" from the group of the Seven Rila Lakes, situated on different terraces ranging

from 2 100 to 2 800 m above sea level, very close to one another, in a valley.

The deepest and the longest river on the Balkan peninsula rise in the Rila, the Maritsa, Iskar and Mesta, while the Strouma is fed by a number of Rila tributaries. The Rila National Park, with 5 reserves, was declared in 1992. Little more than half of the territory of the park is covered by forests, the rest comprises high mountain bushes, meadows and pastures and, of course, rocky massifs and glacial lakes. The lowest parts of the National Park are situated from 1 000 to 1 400 m above sea level, and are wooded with deciduous trees - mainly oak and beech. The main species constituting the forest above that limit - up to 2 100 m are coniferous trees - pine, fir and spruce. Pine-scrub and juniper grow on the higher parts in the subalpine belt. Above this, at an altitude of 2 300 to 2 600, alpine meadows and pastures stretch where about 300 species of plants, which have adapted to the higher humidity and the lower temperatures, can be found.

The Rila mountains are the habitat of wild boar, red deer, roe deer, chamois, wild goats, bears, eagles, falcons, hawks, owls and woodpeckers. The streams abound in mountain trout.

There are deposits of magnetite and quarries producing marble, granite and tufa. There are several hot mineral springs at the foot of the mountains. The rivers of Rila are used for irrigation, water supply and generating electric power. There is a row of dams (such as Beli Iskar, Kalin, Karagyol) and hydro-electric power stations (Beli Iskar, Kalin, Kamenitsa, Pastra and Rila).

The Rila mountains are difficult to climb but roads have been laid out to facilitate the mountaineers, tourists and hikers. A number of holiday houses and huts have been built for the accommodation of all nature lovers.

### *Borovets*

Borovets is one of the two best known mountain resorts of Bulgaria with a 90-year history. It is Bulgaria's largest world-known skiing centre, and a starting point for high mountain hiking and skiing tours in a region of exceptionally varied folklore and exquisite cuisine.

The resort is located in the northern slopes of the Rila moun-

tains, more precisely in the Moussala part which has a typical alpine appearance - pointed peaks, high mountain pastures and meadows, moraines and glacial lakes. It lies at an altitude of 1 300 m. It is surrounded by a century old pine forest, hence the name: "bor" is the Bulgarian for "pine". The distance by air from Borovets to the highest peak in the Balkans - Moussala (2 925 m) is 10 km. The resort is situated at a distance of 72 km from Sofia and 101 km from Plovdiv, the country's second largest city. There are regular bus connections with Sofia, Samokov (the nearest town), Sapareva Banya, Plovdiv and Kostenets. It is located near the country's largest dam - the Iskar Dam - a centre of water sports. It is surrounded by a circle of warm mineral springs. There are several famous spas some 15-10 km away from Borovets.

The fame of the resort dates from 1899, when Prince Ferdinand of Bulgaria built three palaces and a hunting lodge among the aromatic pines in this area. Many high officials and upper class people followed suit and built their own villas, thus the resort known by its Turkish name of Cham Koria, meaning "pine forest", was developed. Borovets was further enlarged and turned into a true skiing centre at the start of the 1930s. The enormous health potential of this part of the Bulgarian land was the original reason for the emergence of this resort. The climatic conditions determined its development as an year-round resort with a mean annual temperature of 5.5°C. It is cool in summer (the average July temperature is 15°C) and mild in winter (average January temperature +5°C). The skiing season starts at the end of November and ends around mid-May. There are ski runs at an altitude of 1 300 to 2 560 m. When it is cold below, it is sunny and pleasant at the heights. When storms rise in the high regions, the weather below is usually calm and good for winter sports.

Every year Borovets is the host of numerous international skiing competitions. Flattering comments have been made by such ski aces as Ingemar Stenmark, Phil and Steve Mahre and Mark Girardelli. There are: nursery slopes, intermediate slopes and ski-runs for advanced skiers, cross-country and biathlon tracks, ski-runs for competitors, an excellent ski school, Ski and Boot hire, modern ropeways with a total capacity of 9 750 persons per hour, hotels with more than 3 000 beds,

25 ski slopes and runs. Off to the west of the Hotel Rila are the nursery slopes, served by 10 draglifts. Experienced skiers favour the pistes on the western ridge of the mountain, which can be reached by a 5 km long gondola lift running up to Yastrebets, the former royal hunting lodge (now a hotel with a cafe nearby). Another chair - lift serves the two ski jumps (55 m and 75 m long). There are also buses to the start of three cross-country runs (3.5 and 10 km long), 2 km away.

Every night powerful machines prepare the ski-runs for the next day skiing. Artificial snow-making machines are also available. All ski-runs are well marked with international signs.

The hotels, as well as the holiday houses in Borovets, are situated on three levels, the possibilities for winter sports right outside the door. The leading hotel in the resort, the Samokov (a 4-star hotel) boasts an excellent location in the resort centre. The gondola lift is approximately 1 minute's walk away. There is a choice of modern-style bedrooms, all with private bath, WC and either balcony or TV. As well as a good range of leisure facilities (Free use of indoor swimming pool, sauna and fitness room), the hotel offers a newly refurbished nightclub and an unusual split-level restaurant.

Borovets also has seven 3-star hotels, all of which are grouped around the central bus terminal. Among them, the most impressive complex is the Rila Hotel - the largest in the Balkans. It is situated at the foot of the nursery slopes, ideally positioned opposite the four-person chairlift. Two types of accommodation facilities are offered: the Studio type, particularly suitable for families with children (main bedroom, plus two extra beds, a kitchen box with dining table, bathroom) and the Hotel type - twin bedroom with an extra couch, usable as an extra bed; and two floor suites with winding staircase.

All three-star hotels and chalets, newly built or recently renovated are comfortable and friendly and renowned locally for their good standard of cuisine, selection of facilities and convenient central location.

There are two "holiday villages" at the northeastern end of the resort: Yagoda, a huddle of wooded villas with pointed roofs, and Malina where you can rent log cabins - many of which have saunas.

The resort offers numerous apres-ski entertainments for all:

evenings with rich musical and artistic programmes, dancing and games, video nights with many surprises, sleigh rides in the resort vicinity, barbecue, winter carnivals, visits to a Bulgarian village and a peasant home, evenings of authentic Bulgarian folklore and evenings of authentic Bulgarian national cuisine.

In summer various excursions and hikes are organized for mountain lovers. The Yastrebets chalet (3 hours' walk or 20 minutes by gondola from Borovets) is the starting point for the ascent of Mount Moussala, which takes about 2 and a half hours. From Mount Moussala it's a 6 hours' trek southwards to the Boris Hadzhisotirov chalet, where one path leads down to Yakoruda on the railway to Bansko; the other trail runs to the Fish Lakes (5 hours). From here, having stayed overnight at the Ribni Ezera chalet, hikers usually push on to the Rila monastery, the biggest in Bulgaria.

## **10. Samokov**

Though it lacks the attraction of antiquity, Samokov has a tradition of skilled work, artistic achievement and popular socialism second to none in Bulgaria. It was founded in the 14th century as a mining community because of the iron ore which was discovered in the neighbouring hills. In the 17th century it had 85 furnaces and 20 foundries whose huge hammers were worked by water power from the river Iskar. Hence the name of the town - it derives from the Bulgarian verb "to forge". In the 18th century it became one of the busiest manufacturing centres in the Turkish empire. All kinds of crafts guilds flourished here, particularly weavers and tailors, who turned flax (still a major product) into uniforms for the Ottoman army. Iron from Samokov was sent to markets throughout the vast empire. From the end of the 17th century until the end of the Turkish rule, Samokov's stature eclipsed that of Sofia and Kyustendil - a prestige which was raised even higher by the artistry of its woodworkers and painters, who decorated the country's finest monasteries. Specimens of their work may be seen in the local museum.

The town's working class and artisan traditions also gave rise to one of Bulgaria's most interesting experiments with socialism, the Samokov Commune. At the beginning of the 20th century the socialist ideas gained ground in Samokov and the town became involved in political struggle. In 1910 the Communist Party won the local elections and established the first local communist government in Bulgaria. It lasted 18 months. During that period a series of local reforms were introduced, particularly in the fields of education, housing and public health. The socialist-dominated council inspected factory conditions, supplied workers' quarters with sewers and electricity, granted books and clothing, and imposed a progressive income tax. It also flew a red flag from the town hall until ordered to cease by the Interior Minister,

and claimed rent for a palace built on municipal land, which so infuriated Tzar Ferdinand that he had a new road built to bypass Samokov en route to Borovets.

Even though it increased its vote during the 1912 election, the Commune was overthrown by the police and conservatives, but the ideals behind it remained in the popular consciousness, helping to inspire another left-wing victory in the local elections of 1919.

Actually, it was still after the Crimean War, when Turkey threw open its markets to the industrial goods of the West, that Samokov began to show signs of decline. The town lost its importance by the turn of the century. Its last foundries and furnaces closed down in 1909, its craft industry declined at the same time.

Today Samokov is developing as an industrial town. There are factories producing linen, cotton and woolen textiles, carpets, toys. There is a sawmill, too, where wood is sawn into planks. Near the town is the State Experimental Farm, where rare plants are cultivated and adapted to the local conditions. There is also a mountain trout hatchery.

### *Sights*

There's plenty of evidence of Samokov's past in and around the town centre. The town's bus station lies immediately below the main square, where a large fountain trickles water: a legacy of the Turks, who considered running water inseparable from civilized living. Close by stands the only one of Samokov's once-numerous mosques to survive, the Barakli Dzhamiya, preserved as a monument to the skills of local builders rather than as a place of worship. Commissioned by the pasha in 1840, the mosque's design betrays Bulgarian influences: its roofline resembles the shape of the "kobilitsa" (a yoke used for carrying buckets); while the interior decoration relies upon plant motifs rather than arabesques, with a magnificent sunset beneath the dome - a piece of orthodox iconography, and typical of the Bulgarian carved ceilings of that period.

During the restoration of the mosque a few years ago a curious fact was revealed. Under the original coat of paint the Bulgarian decorators had drawn crosses and the plan of a church which turned out to

be that of Rila monastery. Three Bulgarian names (Ivan, Risto and Kosto) were also revealed, presumably those of the painters responsible for the decoration of the mosque.

The building has a rectangular plan 16 by 24 metres. The solidly built prayer room measures 14 by 14.8 metres. Four free standing columns support a wooden drum, pierced by windows, on which lies the dome. The compartment for women is situated on the second floor. It is provided with a single row of windows and is accessible from the gallery.

From the outside the volume of the mosque is determined by the main body of the building and by the considerably smaller drum, under whose conical roof the dome is hidden. These are balanced by the slender minaret of medium height which is attached to the middle of the western wall.

A remarkable feature of the mosque are the colourful inner and outer wall paintings which bear the characteristics of the local school of art and cannot be seen in any other similar structure on Bulgarian soil. The only exception is the painting of the prayer room. It should also be noted that some of the architectural forms and details typical of Turkish sacred structures, such as the pointed arches of the openings, the lacy decoration and others are not visible either inside or outside the mosque. This all the more confirms the Bulgarian origin of its builders and decorators.

Just off the main square to its east, the town History Museum traces Samokov's evolution up to the present day. It contains two sections: the ground floor is devoted to the economic and cultural development of the town during the period of the National Revival (18th and 19th c.). The upper floor is devoted to the revolutionary movement in this area.

The town's industrial past is remembered in a sequence of models illustrating the mining and smelting of iron ore: one shows an enormous, waterwheel-powered set of bellows used for forcing air into the furnaces.

Elsewhere the accent is on the various trades which made Samokov famous as a crafts centre, with displays of ceramics, ironmongery, engraving and printing - the latter started by Nikola

Karastoyanov, who opened Bulgaria's first printing house here in the early 19th century.

In the courtyard are the busts of Zakhari Zograf and Nikola Karastoyanov.

However, it's the Samokov School of icon painters which receives the most attention, with pictures and personal effects of the Vienna-trained Hristo Dimitrov and his sons Dimitar and Zakhari. The latter, later known as Zakhari Zograf, is remembered as the greatest and most prolific of Bulgarian 19th c. painters. A few of the personal belongings are here, and his gravestone lies in the museum corridor. A gallery of icon paintings upstairs contains many works by Zakhari's lesser known colleagues, as well as examples of the growing number of secular subjects tackled by the same generation of painters. Note especially the animated figures in Nikola Obrasopisov's 1892 painting "Peasants dancing the horo".

South of the main square, in the old residential quarter of the town is the Convent of Sveta Bogoroditsa. Few can suspect the romance, peace and charm that reign behind the high stone wall of the Samokov convent. One step inside and you feel that time has stopped here, hidden in the shadows of the old buildings. The fine architecture has an attractive originality, and cobbled alleys, the colourful flower beds and refreshing greenery seem to invite you to sit down and relax. Inside the convent church you can enjoy the excellently preserved colourful murals and the magnificent iconostasis.

A little way further on the Church of Sveti Nikolai features cast-iron weathercocks on each of its three domes.

Although such skilful wrought-ironwork embodied the fusion of art and industry during the town's commercial heyday, greater fame acquired the Samokov School of Woodcarvers. Collectively this refers to local artisans (some of whom studied on Mount Athos in Greece in the late eighteen century) in particular to a group formed in the early 19th century, primarily to make the iconostasis for the Rila monastery. Although executed in 1793 on Mount Athos, and later put together in Samokov, the iconostasis of Samokov's Metropolitan Church (the Church of the Virgin) is characteristic of their work. It's covered with intricate figures linked by plant - like ornaments, interspersed with

rosettes - which sometimes took the form of a six - petalled narcissus. The church's collection of icons present the Samokov painting school at its best, with Hristo Dimitrov's "Enthroned Jesus" standing out.

Samokov's woodcarvers generally avoided depicting human figures, preferring to represent eagles, sparrows, hawks, dragons, falcons and, above all, plants. A large iconostasis would require several years work, and most woodcarvers probably undertook less ambitious commissions, such as fitting couches and panelled ceilings in the homes of wealthy citizens.

In 1830, along with the extension of the Church of the Virgin, new wings were added to the iconostasis executed by Master Athanas, the founder of the Samokov school of woodcarving.

The Belyu Church, 4 km south of town on the Borovets road, is called after its donor who was a foundry owner. It is a small chapel, half buried under the ground to avoid being seen by the passing Ottoman rulers. It was richly decorated in 1869 by Samokov artists. The most remarkable figures of saints were provided by Nikola Obrazopisov, the most sought - after of Samokov painters after Zakhari Zograf.

## 11. The Pirin Mountains

Pirin is Bulgaria's wildest range. The heart of the massif consists of 45 peaks all of which are over 2 590 metres high. They are snow-capped most of the year and subject to such powerful winds and violent storms that the Slavs were convinced that this was the abode of the Thunder God, Perun. The slopes are covered with coniferous trees of various kinds. The Baikusheva white spruce is one of the many thousand year-old trees which grow in Pirin. The Bayuvi Doupki Reserve in the north-western part of the mountain, established in 1934, contains some of the most wonderful vegetation species. Short-lived wild flowers abound in the highland valleys, and the slopes are a botanist's delight. The vegetation on the rocks is one that grabs the eye of all admirers of beauty. The symbol of the organized tourism - the edelweiss grows only on the limestone rock walls of Pirin. The whole Pirin flora amounts to 2 000 species. Animal species do not differ from that of the other high mountains in Bulgaria. However, because of the fact that Pirin is situated more to the south, a greater number of animals have ecological niches at higher altitudes than for example the Rila and even higher than in the Balkan mountains. Of great interest are the endangered and the rare species. For some of them the Pirin is a refuge of global importance.

The true alpine meadows and pastures are to be found over 2 500 m above sea level. The white-stone body of Pirin's highest peak - Vihren rises up to 2 915 m above sea level. The highest peaks and most of the lakes are in the northern Pirin, which is criss-crossed with hiking trails between huts which offer simple accommodation for reasonable prices.

### Bansko

Winter lasts for almost half the year in Bansko, a town of 12 000 people nestled amongst greenery in the shadow of ice-capped Mount Vihren, the highest peak in the Pirin range.

Wild goats and bears roam in the mountain crags beneath the snowdrifts which never melt and where the rare flower edelweiss grows. Hawks and eagles lurk almost imperceptibly in the heights.

Thin sheets of ice sparkle in the meadows while dew-washed wild flowers fill in the air with their sweet fragrance. Bansko itself is a feast to the eyes with its lovely old houses and shops, quiet tree-lined streets and its local people.

In recent years Bansko promoted itself as a winter sports resort, but its attractions aren't limited to skiing. The atmosphere here is relaxed yet invigorating, and the community is tightly knit and proud of its achievements.

Founded by exiled clans in the 15th century, Bansko has lived by trade and hard work - growing tobacco at an altitude of 1 000 m above sea level - and has the lowest divorce rate in Bulgaria. This must be a result of sobriety, for Bansko's women had all the pubs shut down between 1946 and 1947, but most locals attribute it to their clannishness, and believe that divorces would be still rarer were it not for the presence of 2000 "outsiders" - immigrants from other Bulgaria towns.

Unlike many Bulgarian towns, Bansko's largely modernized centre exists easily with the older quarters, a maze of cobbled lanes where the timber-framed stone houses hide behind walls with thick double doors, as if built for siege.

During the centuries of Ottoman rule Christian households were required to provide "hospitality" to travellers bearing the Sultan's firman (or seal of authorization), and worse still, were preyed upon by the Bashibozouks - irregular Ottoman troops charged with keeping the native Christian population quiet. It's still a traditional agricultural centre, its narrow streets jammed with goats and the horse-drawn carts of farmers bringing in produce from the outlying fields.

To this day the people of Bansko deeply cherish their customs and traditions. The women's costumes, have all been developed through the ages and passed on from generation to generation. Even today in the towns and villages of the region you can see women wearing colourful aprons woven in red, yellow and green designs, echoing the colours of the sun and the mountain crests together with matching head scarves and silk-embroidered waistcoats. The colours of the sun, the valleys and the rivers can also be seen in the hand-woven rugs typical of the region.

In the late 18th century Bansko was a centre of the National

Revival. Schools were opened, arts and crafts developed, and the new churches being built provided good opportunities for painters, icon-painters and woodcarvers to express themselves. The first artist was Toma Vishanov - Molera. He had been sent to Vienna to a business school, and had come back with a suitcase full of paints and himself full of the ideas of the West European Renaissance. Unfortunately, like anyone who is ahead of his time, his realism went uncomprehended, and the church terminated its contact with him. He was succeeded by his son Dimiter Molerov, who managed to combine the requirements of the time with his father's realistic approach. He painted with three dimensional space and perspective. He also took the liberty - against church canon - of painting the Holy Mother in full figure. But the colours he used were traditional - royal gold and purple red. Dimiter was succeeded by turn by his son Simeon, who was then succeeded by his son Georgi - all of them Molerovs.

The general first impression one gets of Bansko's architecture of the National Revival is its outstanding stylistic unity and artistic wholeness. There are over 100 preserved and restored houses here dating from the 17th-19th centuries. The development of trade, crafts and cattle-breeding in that period encouraged the local population to develop its own style of architecture, which expressed its new self-confidence and social standing. The exterior of the houses is typified by the monumental façade. From the side they resemble miniature medieval castles behind whose walls was the "world" of the Bulgarian, of the Bansko man who zealously guarded his national identity and culture. The ground floors were built of solid stone masonry. In the earlier houses this technique also extended to the upper storeys, while in the 19th century the upper storeys began to see lighter construction, giving greater leeway to artistic invention. The exterior elements of the houses show a large variety of detail. The protruding bays of the upper storeys and the overhanging eaves add to the sense of lightness of construction, which here, in Bansko is particularly marked. This is complimented by the solid outline of the chimneys, the finely finished supporting columns and the massive doors and window-frames. The interior plan is subjected to the idea of providing security and comfort. The ground floors were used as workshops, stores, places to keep the

domestic animals in winter and hiding places as well. The narrow slits in the walls were designed to be used for shooting in case of enemy attack. In the richer houses, a separate part of the house was built as a tower serving as a hiding place. An interesting fact concerning Bansko is that the hiding places of different houses were interconnected. During the Ottoman periods, “underground” Bansko was a sure refuge for the rebellious local population.

The plan of the house was divided into three main sections: for every day use, reception quarters and a section for household functions. One of the living rooms was the centre of family life. Here was the hearth where food was prepared, the sofa for resting, the shelves where the kitchen vessels were kept, the closets, the icons and others. The reception room was complimented by the finely decorated chest for the dowry as well as the copper plates and bowls which shone on their wooden shelves.

The existence of separate functional groups of rooms reflects ideas common throughout the country at the time. Some rooms, however, are specific to the houses of Bansko, such as the lounge connecting the verandah with the living rooms and bedrooms, and the “service room” where the dough was kneaded.

The interior decoration of ceilings, cupboards and walls along with the colourful carpets and blankets contribute to the overall immense impact on the visitor.

The most outstanding example of Bansko architecture is the house of Velyanov which is turned into a museum.

### *Sights*

On one corner of the main square stands the Nikola Vaptsarov Museum, dedicated to the local-born revolutionary poet. An engineer by training he shared the Futurists’ enthusiasm for the machine age and joined the wartime resistance in the courage of his Communist convictions. Vaptsarov’s final poem was composed in a Sofia prison as he awaited execution.

A few steps south of the central square bearing the name of Vaptsarov, lies a smaller square dominated by the statue of an even more renowned person born in Bansko - Otets (“Father”) Paisii.

Although Bulgarian arts and religion were kept alive in monasteries and folk songs during the years of Ottoman rule, the history of Bulgaria before the conquest was almost submerged by 1762, when Bansko - born Paisii of Hilendar (1722-73) completed his seminal Slav Bulgarian History. Started after 1745, when Paisii became a monk at the monastery on Mount Athos, it both exalted past glories and the task of National Revival. Circulated in manuscript form for decades before its publication, Paisii's history inspired generations of Bulgarian nationalists.

Just above the small square is the Church of Sveta Troitsa, the existence of which owes a great deal to the efforts of another patriot associated with Bansko, Neofit Rilski. Born in 1793, Neofit was a key figure in the 19th century resurgence of Bulgarian education and church life, in the face of Turkish restrictions and Greek influence, and led the campaign to restore Rila monastery and build the local church. To accomplish this required a bribe to the governor and to the official witness of the "discovery" of an icon on the site (which qualified the site as "holy ground" suitable for a Christian place of worship). A wall was then raised to conceal the townsfolks' enlargement of the church beyond the size set by Turkish clerks - for which the mayor of Bansko was jailed for five years in Thessaloniki.

One monument in the churchyard remembers Peyo Yavorov, poet and warleader, who liberated Bansko from the Turks on October 5, 1912, proclaiming "Throw away your fezzes, brothers! From today you are free Bulgarians".

Behind the church is the Neofit Rilski House, with recreated period rooms and a display illustrating Rilski's career. Near the northern end of the small square is an Icon Museum grouped around the galleried courtyard of a former nunnery. The works on display illustrate the careers of Bansko's 19th century icon-painters - a school largely centred around the Vienna educated painter Toma Vishanov, who together with pupils Dimitar and Simeon Molerov travelled from village to village decorating the region's churches. One highlight of the museum is an anonymous Wheel of Time, in which everyday village scenes are encircled by portrayals of the different ages of man.

The nearby Velyanov House is a typical stone-built house open

to the public, with 19th century furnishings and rugs on display inside.

The Hadzhivalchova House remembers the late-18th century Bansko merchant Hadzhi Valcho, who exploited the village's position midway between the Danube and the Aegean to build up a minor trading empire, with offices in Vienna. He was a major patron of the arts (his wealth was instrumental in encouraging the early development of the Bansko icon school), and donated large sums of money both to Rila monastery and Zografski monastery on Mount Athos in Greece.

On the other side of the town, just east of the rail and bus station, the town cemetery holds the early 19th century Church of the Holy Virgin: formerly home to an exquisite iconostasis carved by local artisans; it was destroyed by fire a couple of years ago. Fortunately the central doors of the church's iconostasis, decorated with paintings by Toma Vishanov - Molera can be seen in the icon museum.

## **12. The Rhodope Mountains**

The Rhodopes are situated in the centre of the Balkan Peninsula. Occupying most of Southern Bulgaria, they are actually the largest mountains in the country. They are about 400 km long and 100 km wide. Their average height is 785 m; their highest peak Golyam Perelik is 2 191 m above sea level. The greater part of the mountains lies in Bulgaria, only their southern slopes lie in Greece.

The name of the mountains is of Thracian origin. According to a legend, retold by Ovid, the mortal lovers Haemus, a Thracian boy, and Rhodopis, a Thracian girl, flattered each-other by calling themselves after the divine Zeus and Hera. This angered God Zeus, who punished the couple by turning them into mountains, the Haemus and the Rhodopes, separated by the Plain of Thrace.

According to Thracian mythology, the Rhodopes are the land where the panpipes, Orpheus and Orphic cult originated. Orpheus was the Thracian singer and musician whose mastery of the lyre moved animals and trees to dance. With his songs Orpheus tried to regain his dead wife, Eurydice, who had died from a poisonous snake bite, from the underworld. His music charmed God Hades himself, who agreed to return Eurydice on the condition that Orpheus did not turn back until he set his feet in the human world; but emerging into the sunlight of the overworld, Orpheus turned back to smile at his beloved and so lost her forever. Thereafter, Orpheus roamed the Rhodopes singing mournfully until he was torn apart by “followers of Dionysus”.

Nature has endowed this mountainous land with a particularly healthy climate. Its closeness to the Mediterranean, the varied landscape, the rich network of rivers and lakes, the evergreen coniferous trees and the lack of pollution from industrial enterprises provide favourable conditions for a healthy life in the mountains even today. The variations in temperature are rare. The spring is rainy, the summer

is pleasantly cool and there are no summer heats. The autumn is warm and dry and the winter is snowy and sunny. The climate has set the pattern for two tourist seasons here - summer season from June to October and winter season from December to April.

A number of rivers rise in the Rhodopes. Most of them flow northward and empty into the Maritsa. A number of dams have been built across them and a number of hydroelectric power stations generate electric power.

The Rhodopes are rich in lead and zinc ores (Madan, Roudozem) and chromium ores (Kroumovgrad). Nowadays Kurdzhali, a town in Eastern Rhodopes, is the centre of Bulgarian non-ferrous metallurgy.

There are more than one hundred beauty spots, including reserves, trees and picturesque sites, which are under the state's protection. The most famous of them are visited daily by tourists. These are the Trigrad Gorge and the Devil's Throat Cave, the Buinovo Gorge and Yagodina Cave, the rock formation Chudnite Mostove (the Marvellous Bridges), the Thirteen Brothers, the Smolyan Lakes, Chairite (the Pastures) near Trigrad, etc.

The Rhodope mountains have vast coniferous forests, especially in their western section. About 3/4 of all coniferous trees in the country grow in the Rhodopes. Seventeen natural reserves can be distinguished in the mountains. They are the habitat of various tree species - spruce, pine trees, beech and fir-trees. Old high-stem oak forests can also be seen. The specific geomorphological, climatic and other conditions define the extremely great diversity of plant co-habits. The lowest parts of the mountains are dominated by hornbeam, flowering ash, maple, juniper, sycamore, aspen, silver birch and other deciduous forests. Among the grass vegetation rare species can be found.

The southern location of the mountains, the relatively long vegetation period and the fertile soils are the reason for the rich grass cover and wonderful meadows which stretch over forests cleared in the past. The rounded grassy slopes of the Rhodopes are a characteristic and most common feature of the landscape.

The fauna of the Rhodopes includes the bear, the wolf, the fox,

the badger, the marten, the wild cat, the wild boar, the deer, the roe deer, and many bird species - the golden eagle, the hawk, the buzzard, the falcon, the hazel hen, the dove, the owl, the black woodpecker, etc. Hunting and fishing has always been practised here. In the Smolyan district there are two specialized reserves where foreign quests can hunt for game all the year round. Rivers abound in trout, barbel, grey mullet, carp and other fresh water fish.

The Rhodopes attract many holiday makers. The mountains are abundant in mineral springs. The best known spas are Velingrad, Mihalkovo, Narechen, Voden, Haskovo and Davidkovo. The largest and best accommodated resort is Pamporovo.

### *Pamporovo*

The Pamporovo ski resort is situated 1 650 m above sea level, at the foot of Mount Snezhanka (1 962 m) in Eastern Rhodopes. It is located in a region famous for its unique folklore traditions within 260 km of Sofia and 85 km of Bulgaria's second largest city, Plovdiv.

The climate of Pamporovo is an exclusive one, featuring a soft winter with an average of 120 sunny days and extensive snow, while the snow cover reaches a thickness of 1.40 metres. The resort is under the significant meteorological influence of the Aegean Sea with skiing season from mid-December to mid-April.

Pamporovo offers wonderful skiing opportunities with a range of beautiful runs on the Snezhanka mountain. The total length of the pistes is 25 km. The piste types are: easy - 11 runs; intermediate - 4 runs, and difficult - 2 runs. Pamporovo's ski terrain is ideal for first-timers with its long nursery slopes to learn on. The local ski-school runs special group lessons which begin at the Malina lifts. The number of the ski-school instructors is 120, approximately 100 English speaking. Ski tuition lasts for 6 days (4 hours per day) and by the end of the week beginners are given a Ski Diploma and are expected to ski up at the top of the mountain. Moderate intermediates and reasonable skiers will find Pamporovo a very good place for their second and third ski holiday. Skiers can take the Malina chair-lift to the middle station, followed by Studenets lift to the summit, and find a choice of wide, flattering runs (the longest one is 4 km long), leading back to the village.

Stronger skiers will head for the aptly named "The Wall" - a steep and challenging black mogul field. Otherwise, there is an international slalom course, snowboarding and cross-country trails - 25 km long. The total number of lifts is 14 (4 chair lifts and 4 drag-lifts) with an uphill capacity per hour of 15 000 people. All ski runs are safeguarded and maintained in a perfect condition. Fourteen ski rentals near the ski runs and the lift stations offer sets of skiing equipment from world famous companies, as well as toboggans, sledges, snowboards, etc. Children between 5 and 8 can visit the kindergarten at the ski school.

Pamporovo offers luxury comfort in 7 high class hotels of an original Rhodope style. One of Pamporovo's top hotels, the Perelik, is attractively designed in modern alpine style and is conveniently situated in the resort centre. There is a lovely atmosphere throughout the hotel, as well as a good range of facilities. The main ski lifts are easily reached by the regular shuttle bus service, mornings and afternoons. The hotel offers buffet-style breakfast, 3-course evening meals with a choice of main course and dessert buffet, free drinks, free use of indoor swimming pool, sauna, fitness room, solarium and bowling alley. There is a choice of 5 bars, a disco and a traditional Tavern with occasional live music, as well as a coffee lounge and a shopping arcade. All bedrooms have private bath or shower, WC, TV and most are with balcony.

Hotel Panorama, Hotel Sokol and Hotel Murgavetz, conveniently situated and beautifully appointed, are on offer for British tourists throughout the skiing season. The atmosphere is always fun with a varied night-life and excellent value prices.

Guests of Pamporovo would be well advised to try the original cuisine of the region (especially the "Chevermeto" for mouthwatering lamb) and the world-famous Bulgarian wines, which are usually accompanied at the different taverns by excellent folk groups performing lively, centuries-old dances.

Pamporovo offers also a large choice of apres-ski entertainment, ski carnivals and shows. A full-day guided coach tour to Plovdiv is organized for weary skiers. An excursion to the Rhodope Bridges is also on offer.

The favourable climate, the crystal clear air, the beautiful land-

scape and the infinite greenery make Pamporovo attractive to mountain hikers and convalescents in all seasons. The resort is recommended for chronic bronchitis, high blood pressure, arteriosclerosis and neurasthenia. Good roads make every settlement and beauty spot accessible. The hospitality of Rhodopian people is well known and worthy of its praise.

### **13. Bulgarian Customs and Festivals**

Most Bulgarian festivals are associated with the different stages of the agricultural year, but they are celebrated as feast days of Orthodox saints. Their roots can be traced down to remote times of pagan beliefs and cults. Ancient rites have blended with Christian rituals and this is what accounts for the great variety of customs and traditions as regards the Bulgarian festival calendar.

Since 1989 some changes in this calendar have occurred. Some ideological holidays have disappeared to be replaced by more traditional festivities such as Easter (Velikden) and Christmas (Koleda). There is an increasing awareness too of church festivals and saint's days. A surprising number of village customs connected with the seasonal rites are still in use and can be seen at the right time of year.

In most of the bigger towns there are ethnographic museums displaying the local specific features of the customs and rites.

The festival calendar begins with New Year's Day or St. Basil's (Vasil's) Day, also known as "survaki". On January 1st young children go from house to house offering New Year wishes for happiness and prosperity throughout the coming year. They sing special songs and slap the householders on the back with a "survaknitsa" - a rod, cut from a cornel tree, adorned with brightly coloured threads, dried fruit and popcorn. The children are given buns, nuts, sweets and coins. Another popular custom which has been preserved to this day is the New Year's banitsa (a kind of cheese pie) which contains "charms".

They have been secretly put and each member of the family is given an equal piece and looks for the charm which may promise love, happiness, or health during the coming year.

In wine-producing areas festivities take place on February 1st - St. Tryfon's Day or Tryfon Zarezan. Traditionally, this is the time of year when the vines are pruned, hence the name Zarezan or the Pruner,

given to the saint by the vine-growers. St. Tryfon is the Christian successor to Dionysus - the Thracian god of wine and gaiety. On this day traditional fertility rites are performed in the vineyards: wine is poured on the roots of the vines and pruning starts to the accompaniment of traditional instruments. It goes without saying that the occasion is spiced with the tasting of the new wine which has just matured.

Another more widespread festival associated with the start of the agricultural year is “Kukerov den” on the first Monday of Lent. The “Kukeri” dance recalls the Dionysian rites, but in reality its origin may be traced even further back in the religious practices of the primitive ploughmen of these areas, who tried to influence the forces of the nature by looking as frightening as possible. They believed they could drive the evil spirits of winter away and welcome the good ones bringing fertility to the land with springtime. So, on this day processions are led through the village by the dancing, leaping kukeri - men, dressed up in animal costumes, grotesque masks, with sheep bells hanging round their waists. They gather in the village square and slowly sway round in a wide circle and the clanging of the huge bells may be deafening even if you stand at a distance. It is a wonder how they manage to dance under the weight of their costumes.

The advent of spring is celebrated on March 1st - Baba Marta - Old Woman Marta, Granny Marta. Peasant households attempt a round of spring cleaning on this day, symbolically sweeping the winter months away. On the same day people present each other with a “martenitsa” - a good luck charm, made up of twined red and white woolen threads. To assure good health and protection from the evil influence of March - a month of dangerously changeable weather in Bulgaria, attributed to the unpleasant temperament of Granny Marta, people tie their martenitsas round the wrist, pin it on the lapel. It should be worn until one first sees a stork or a swallow. Then it is taken off and either thrown on the roof or placed under a stone. The stone is lifted after forty days: if ants are crawling under it, it is a sign of happiness and health; if there are worms instead of ants, it is considered a bad sign.

One typical springtime fertility rite is “lazaruvane” on St. Lazar’s Day (eight days before Easter). This is the day of the resurrec-

tion of Lazar, but it is also the day of the fields, pastures and forests. The rite is performed by young girls, considered fit for marriage. They go from house to house, perform ritual dance, songs and games and wish fertility to the householders. They do the same in the fields and finally in the village square. In the afternoon they gather again for their luck in marrying and settling down to be foretold.

Easter - the anniversary of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ - is a movable feast and is celebrated on the first Sunday (Easter Day/Sunday) with or after a full moon in the period between April 4th and May 8th. Easter Sunday and Easter Monday have been national holidays for a few years now but they have always been observed by the Bulgarian people in the tradition, set by the Orthodox Church. The festivities are not very different from those in the rest of Europe. Easter eggs are dyed on Maundy (Holy) Thursday or Holy Saturday and Easter cakes and buns are baked. During the Holy week devout people go to church every day and the service on Holy Saturday night is attended by lots of people. Easter Sunday is the end of Lent and tables cannot be seen for food. The feast traditionally begins with striking dyed eggs one into another to see which the "winner" is - the hardest Easter egg. Luck and good health await its owner. The coming of the summer is marked on May 21 - the feast day of saints Constantine and Elena, characterized by fire-dancing (barefoot on hot embers) in some of the remoter villages of southeastern Bulgaria's Strandzha hills. This old custom is said to have been brought over from Asia Minor. Some ethnologists claim that it is descended from the religious rites of the Thracians. The Thracians worshipped the sun. In their homes they kept the holy fire burning in the sacrificial hearths all the time. Women danced barefooted on glowing embers and prayed to the sun, begging of it fertility. Later it merged with the old Slavic custom of making a fire and jumping over it at Midsummer Night (June 24), a health and fertility rite. And much later it was connected with the day of the Christian saints Constantine and Elena. Unfortunately, this custom is no longer part of village life and is performed for the benefit of tourists along the coast these days. A great fire is made, the embers are spread and the dancers, having been in a religious trance for a couple of days, run crosswise over the carpet of embers in their bare feet. They hold

icons in their hands and dance to the accompaniment of traditional instruments, usually bagpipes and drums.

Sundry other church holidays coincide with the changing of the seasons: Golyama Bogoroditsa - the Day of the Dormition of the Virgin on August 28 traditionally marks the beginning of autumn; the end of the farming year is celebrated on October 26 - Dimitrovden or St. Demetrius's Day. St. Nicholas's Day - Nikulden is celebrated on December 6 not only by fishermen and seamen, whose patron the saint is, but by all Bulgarians. The tradition is fish and especially carp dishes to be eaten on this day.

Characteristic of the Bulgarian Koleda - Christmas is the "koleduvane". On Christmas Eve, in the afternoon usually, the village boys and young men pour into the streets and go from house to house, singing Christmas songs, the Bulgarian equivalent of carols. Apart from their religious contents, these songs include good wishes and praise for the householders. The "koledari" are given apples, walnuts and sometimes coins. In some areas the boys and young men decorate their clothes with strings of popcorn. Their leader, the "stanenik", is charged with the baking of a specially decorated loaf of bread which the singers take with them on their rounds. Christmas loaves are on the table on Christmas Eve alongside the other meatless dishes: cheese and pumpkin pastry, dried fruit, etc. The families gather round the table in the evening expecting the great news that Christ the Saviour was born.

### *National Holidays*

Banks, shops, post offices, etc. are closed on major national holidays although privately owned cafes, exchange bureaux or provision shops may open up in big cities and resorts.

January 1	New Year's Day
March 3	Liberation of Bulgaria
Easter Sunday, Easter Monday	
May 1	Labour Day
May 24	Day of Bulgarian Education and Culture
December 25	Christmas Day

## *Prominent Saint's Days*

May 6	St. George's Day (Gergyovden)
May 11	SS Cyril and Methodius
May 21	SS Constantine and Elena
July 20	St. Elijah's Day (Ilinden)
August 28	Dormition of the Virgin
September 8	Birth of the Virgin
October 26	St. Demetrius (Dimitrovdan)
November 8	Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Archangelovden)
December 6	St. Nicholas (Nikulden)

## **14. Bulgarian Cuisine**

When a person travels abroad, he usually hopes to find the kind of food he has been used to in his own country. But fortunately, there is a larger group of travellers and holidaymakers who want to experience something new. If Bulgaria is unknown to you, the Bulgarian food should be even less known. “There is nothing to worry about”, a British visitor to Bulgaria once said, “because everything in Bulgaria is prepared from high-quality ingredients, everything is clean and delicious.”

Bulgarian national cuisine is very varied. Many peoples crossed the Bulgarian lands and left their influence on our food. Many dishes have untranslatable names, but excellent taste.

The principles of the Bulgarian cuisine are simple: moderate oven, stewing, not frying; the pots are firmly closed; a wide variety of ingredients is used; vegetable oils and fats depending on the dish; condiments are few and all this is put together to stew into its own juice.

Bulgaria is situated on the Balkan Peninsula, and almost all Balkan countries make great use of different kinds of meat, fish, potatoes, aubergine and many other vegetables, spices and herbs. Needless to say, Bulgaria makes no exception.

Let's begin with starters. They can be cold and hot. There are some kinds of salads which are very often had either at a catering establishment or at home. Shopska salad is the best known of the salads because of its taste and easy preparation - chopped tomatoes and cucumber, some fresh or baked peppers, some onion, vegetable oil, parsley, and all this is topped with grated white cheese. Trakiiska salad is a mixture of yoghurt, chopped cucumbers or gherkins, flavoured with garlic and crushed walnuts. Other popular salads are raw or pickled cabbage salad, chopped lettuce, baked and peeled peppers, boiled

potatoes with onion, beans, beet, as well as many kinds of pickles. The latter vary according to the seasons, and this is the reason why some of the vegetables such as cabbage, green tomatoes, carrots and cauliflower are usually preserved in pickle for the winter months. Kyopoolu is another favourite. It is a mess of baked aubergines, peppers, finely cut tomatoes, garlic pestled with oil and salt, and oil and vinegar to taste.

Salads in Bulgaria are either had as a starter or together with the main course.

Soups are another popular starters. The most unusual one is the “tarator”, made from diluted yoghurt, chopped cucumbers, crushed garlic and walnuts, some dill and vegetable oil, and salt to taste. It is served cold in the summer months. Another typical soup is the so called “shkembe chorba”, which is a tripe soup, usually flavoured with some garlic and vinegar. Also worth tasting is the “kourban chorba”, a clear soup made from mutton or lamb. Of course, there is a great variety of vegetable soups, some of which are very similar to the British ones: from spinach, nettle, dock, sorrel, tomatoes, etc. If the second course is dark, the soup is light; if the second course contains potatoes and peas, the soup is without vegetables; if there is pastry, there is no vermicelli in the soup.

The Bulgarian table is particularly rich in autumn. What is more, in the autumn the hills and mountains of Bulgaria are full of game, and the shoals of fish in the Black Sea are the best at that time. The Bulgarians eat a lot of meat and that is why the main course usually contains meat or fish. And now, it is time we mentioned the main difference between Bulgarian and British way of cooking. While in Germany, Britain and other countries sauce, meat and vegetables are cooked separately, in Bulgaria they are cooked together. The recipes for different dishes and stews are numerous. Our dishes are usually cooked in a saucepan or casserole, or in an earthenware pot on a slow fire. And here comes the other typical feature of Bulgarian cooking - the abundant use of herbs and spices, although their number is not that great.

I'd like to say a few words about Bulgarian seasonings. They roughly fall into 3 categories: AROMATIC - they are of vegetable ori-

gin, mainly, such as parsley, dill, garlic onion, mint, celery, savory, thyme, basil, etc, as well as the imported spices: vanilla, cinnamon, bay leaves, caraway seed (for baking), cumin (for roasting), coriander, etc.; **GUSTATORY** - they are also of vegetable origin with the exception of salt - vinegar, paprika, chili, leeks, horseradish, mustard, wormwood, juniper, lemon, carrots, tomato puree and poppy seeds; and **TINCTORIAL** - as for them, paprika, carrots and tomato puree have both colouring and flavouring value in cooking. Bulgaria also produces industrially mixed spices and condiments in the form of powders, concentrated sauces and piquant purees.

The lavish use of spices has had its history since ancient times.

There are spice-related expressions in the Bulgarian language, such as "a peppery price" (pepper was very expensive in the 15th century); "parsley in every pot" (for someone who forces his opinion on everyone and everything).

Onion is used in almost all soups, salads and dishes. Herodotus wrote about it that it gives strength and prevents illness. It has been proved that it stimulates appetite, has a disinfectant action, and helps digestion.

The Bulgarian national cuisine is mistakenly said to be chilly. Some Bulgarian dishes are pungent, but not so much as those of Mexican, Arab, Hungarian, Indian or Turkish cuisine. We serve separately chillies and pickles for those who like their food hot. The "motley salt", which is served in folk-style restaurants together with hot round loaves, is chilly, too. It is prepared from dried paprika which is pestled, salt, savory, jasmine or mint, popcorn, pumpkin seeds.

Grilled minced meat is typical of the Bulgarian cuisine. You can order "kebapcheta" or "kyufteta" (oblong or round in form), or the famous mixed grill, which includes a kebapche, a meatball, a chop and some sausage and skewered meat (shishche).

After dinner, you may be offered some white or yellow cheese, ham or loukanka (highly seasoned flat sausage) to go with your after-dinner drink. The Bulgarian yellow cheese can be compared to some Dutch cheeses or the well-known Swiss Emmental, but it is different.

Unlike West-European cheeses, "kashkaval" is made mainly from sheep's milk. It is a superb appetizer for wines, an ingredient of

warm soups and meals or pastry delicacies. There are some varieties made from cow's milk, "fortified" with cream. The technology is quite complicated, and you'll never regret it if you happen to watch the process in some dairy. The most famous variety is "Balkan Kashkaval", dry, rich and with a complex range of scents and tastes. Traditionally, it has been regarded as the major food of most Bulgarian centenarians.

Bulgarian sweet courses are rather different from those in Britain. Of course, there are some similarities between cakes, but puddings, for example, are very rare here. Typical of Bulgarian desserts are some Turkish ones, usually in syrup, such as "baklava" or "kadaif", and a lot of fresh fruits in summer and autumn. Also much eaten are: pancakes, "mekitsi" (batter fried in deep oil), ice-cream, and the world-famous Bulgarian yoghurt, but not with fruit as in Britain.

A special mention should be made of the latter, because it is a healthful bonus for tourists in Bulgaria, which is made from cow's and sheep's milk and sometimes from goat's. This original Bulgarian speciality is widely used in the Balkan countries and is produced under licence all over the world. A guarantee of the good taste and healthful qualities of the yoghurt is due to the Bulgarian ferment, called "bacterium Bulgaricum", showing its native origin. The owner of Danone, who is of Bulgarian origin, is nowadays producing yoghurt in Bulgaria, too. Our yoghurt has become an ingredient in Japanese dishes as well.

Yoghurt has been part of our cuisine for thousands of years. Experience has taught the Bulgarians to use it in many ways. It makes a wonderful dessert when it is well-cooled and sprinkled with sugar. It may be also had diluted with water, the so called "ayran". Yoghurt has the vitamin content of fresh milk, containing vitamins B, B<sub>1</sub>, PP, A, E, D and P. It helps to ward off many diseases. It is the best dilutant for antibiotics and also helps after drinking alcohol, and eases upset stomach after over-eating. Besides, it is a low-caloric food and can be used in all slimming diets.

The usual with-dinner drink is wine - red, white or rosé, depending on the dish you are eating. Bulgaria is famous for its light and inexpensive wines. It is a country with long traditions in vine-growing and wine-making and a renowned exported to more than 70 countries.

About 300 vine varieties are grown in our lands. There is a choice of excellent wines; the Gumza is similar to Burgundi; the Mavroud tastes like Bordeaux; the Melnik - like Malaga. A rosé called Pamid resembles some of the Beaujolais Nouveau varieties. As to white wines, Tamyanka and Dimyat are very popular. The Muscadels are similar to the Moselle wines. The wormwood wines are very delicate, with a specific flavour. The Osmarsko is the best wormwood wine. The herb it is made from was worshipped by the ancient Celts as the mother of all herbs.

The most usual hard drinks in Bulgaria are mastika, flavoured with aniseed, and plum or grape brandy. The Bulgarian brandy is weaker, around 38-40°, not blended, made in environment-friendly regions, where nature and the weather improve it. Good brandy is at least three years old. The best brands are: Bourgaska Mouskatova, Slivenska Perla, Pomoriiska, Evksinogradsk, Roussenska Bisserna, Tetevenska, Troyanska, etc. They are often had with salads or other appetizers, such as cold or hot dishes of offal, for example. You may also have different kinds of beer with some sea food or chips, especially in summer months.

The brandy-type cognacs, usually served with coffee, are also excellent. Pliska is the most preferred one. Ironically, the best known Bulgarian cognac was named after the city where the great Bulgarian Khan Kroum had passed his cruel law against wine-making, and ordered to uproot vines to prevent drunkenness eleven hundred years ago. Preslav and Pomorie are even better, and Euxignac is unsurpassed. Naturally, all establishments serve popular European drinks.

Coffee in Bulgaria is much more drunk than tea. In some places it is still served the Turkish way - in a copper pot. But most coffee-shops offer espresso or instant coffee.

In Bulgaria, you will find a great variety of soft drinks - fizzy ones or natural juices which are usually made with mineral water from the area they are produced.

It should also be mentioned that Bulgaria has a wealth of mineral springs. Their water has a beneficial effect on the human body. You can find bottled mineral water in every shop or catering establishment, so try it, and you'll never regret it.

## **15. Vine-growing and Wine-production in Bulgaria**

Many sources from antiquity confirm the fact that vine-growing was developed as early as the first millennium B.C. in the areas south of the Balkan Range right down to the Northern Aegean Coast and along the Black Sea coast. The oldest information about wine production is contained in Homer's Iliad and Odyssey. Odysseus boasted that his ships were laden with amphoras and wine-skins containing red sparkling wine made by the Thracians. And in the Iliad Homer wrote, "Ateus, there is an abundance of wine in your tents and the Achaeans brought some from Thrace across the wide sea to Troy."

The most interesting and most worshipped god by the Thracians was Dionysus - the merry god of vines and wine. The widespread cult of Dionysus was reflected on monuments depicting vines, bunches of grapes, vintage scenes, grape squashing, wine transport and so on. The murals in the Kazanluk Tomb and the Panagyurishte gold treasure testify to the fact that grapes and wine occupied an important place in the life of the ancient Thracians. In vine-growing and wine production Thracians used various tools and vessels such as sowers, hoes, pruning knives, baskets, barrels, wine skins, amphoras, rhytons, wine goblets, etc. Following an old Thracian tradition the amphora-rhyton was made with two necks at opposite ends so that host and guest could drink wine from one and the same vessel. During the period of complete incorporation of Thrace into the south-east Mediterranean world Greek chroniclers continued to describe Dionysus, the enthusiastic patron of Vine festivals, whose cult festivities fertilized ancient Greek drama and can rightly be considered as a predecessor of modern theatre.

Wine must have been in great abundance in the first Bulgarian state. The old Bulgarian word "zdravitsa", adopted as a good wish in almost all Slav languages, was used when raising a glass of wine.

During the time of his reign Khan Kroum (803-814) issued an

order for the destruction of all vines. In all probability few people in those days differentiated between drinking and getting drunk. But there is sufficient ground to believe that Kroum himself repealed his order in due time and Byzantine chroniclers, too, wrote that the Khan's subjects in the Bulgarian capital of Pliska produced considerable quantities of wine.

Connoisseurs of the Mavrud wine are fond of telling a legend which might offer an explanation as to why the wine was restored to its original pride of place in the Bulgarian lands. A young man by the name of Mavrud was serving in Constantinople on an assignment for the Khan when the order for uprooting the vines was issued. When he returned to Pliska, the then capital, he went for a walk one evening and suddenly a ferocious lion, which had escaped from the royal palace's cage, appeared before him. Rumours had it later on that it had been deliberately let out to chase late night drunkards. At any rate, strong and daring Mavrud tore the powerful beast apart barehanded. The Khan asked to see the hero and Mavrud confessed that before leaving home that night he had drunk some red wine. It turned out that his mother had continued to cultivate the grapevine in her garden secretly. Khan Kroum appreciated the warrior's valour as well as the expedience of a moderate drink. Under the new law wine-drinking was allowed at weddings and at seasonal festivities. Young Mavrud was appointed royal cup-bearer and the grapes of that vine were to be called from that time on "Mavrud".

The grape vine enjoys great respect among the Bulgarian people, and is extolled in many folk songs and legends. There is wine at all family gatherings and rituals. At weddings the newly weds are given a sip of wine each during the marriage ceremony so that their married life will be harmonious. Women in childbirth are also given a little wine to drink for the infant's health through life. There is no funeral without wine. A little wine is spilt over the grave in the sign of the cross so that the earth will accept the deceased. Wine is also used in folk medicine. If someone was cut by a sickle at harvest time wine was poured over the wound. Heated wine is used against colds. Today much of our people's ancient experience with wine has been lost, but the people producing wine enjoy unanimous respect.

Vine-Grower's Day (Trifon Zarezan) is celebrated particularly festively. Every year on February 14 the vine-growers, dressed in their best clothes and decked with crane's bill and boxwood, go to the vineyards accompanied by the sound of music. The best vine-grower symbolically prunes a vine, pours wine on it and wishes for a rich vintage. Later the celebrations continue in the village where the master of each home offers wine and treats the guests on it.

The harvest time can occur as late as the middle of October if the summer has been particularly dry and sunny. The grapes are allowed to cool in the basements before being pressed and left to ferment in the chilly cellars of the houses. Nearly every family has at least one cask of wine for private consumption.

Bulgaria has been a vine-growing and wine-producing country for centuries. The vine grows on southern, sunny slopes up to 600 m above sea level. Abundant sunshine is essential. The regions, where the temperature is not below 0°C for more than 200 days, are the most suitable for it. Such are the extensive coastal areas of flat lands in Bulgaria, the sheltered valleys in the south and southwest of the country and the fertile plains in the north. Combined with the varied soils, the climate with hot and dry summers and comparatively mild autumn days, allowing the grapes more time to mature, provides the ideal growing conditions for a variety of grapes, both foreign and local. The great experience and skill of the Bulgarian vine-growers and wine-makers, assisted by the Research Institute in Plevan, devoted to sort improvement, are the other very important prerequisites for the development of these two branches of the agriculture and economy of Bulgaria.

However, vine-growing and wine-producing are going through a difficult period at present as are all branches of our economy and agriculture. The land reform hasn't been completed yet and as a result the actual owners of the land resources are not certain. Thus vine-growing has been neglected lately which is not an exception in the present-day situation in Bulgaria. Still, there are four regions traditionally recognized as vine-growing: the northern, southern, southwestern and the Black Sea regions. The most widespread varieties of grapes in

Bulgaria today are: Gumza, Dimiat, Red Musket, White Musket, Pamid, Cabernet, Rkatsiteli, Riesling, Otel, Bolgar, etc. The latter is the most widely grown variety of table grapes in Bulgaria.

The northern vine-growing region can roughly be divided into two parts - the vineyards along the Danube and those in the districts of Pleven and Veliko Tarnovo.

Pleven and Veliko Tarnovo vineyard massifs are very old and extend over to the Black Sea vine-growing region, including the vine plantations at Targovishte, Preslav, Shoumen and Provadia. The sorts grown are predominantly wine ones, notable for their high sugar content and fragrance.

The Danubian district stretches from Bregovo (Vidin) to Siliстра. Wine varieties like Pamid and Gumza are grown in the west whereas table ones, mainly Bolgar, are grown in the east.

Dimiat and Pamid are the most common sorts of grapes grown along the Black Sea coast along with some table sorts such as Cardinal, Perla, Chaush, etc. The vineyard massifs are near Varna, Bourgas, Pomorie and Sozopol. The Southern vine-growing region is very old and clearly outlined. The most widespread sorts are Mavrud, Pamid, Dimiat and Bolgar. A great deal of the harvested grapes is exported. Vetren, Karabunar, Septemvri, Perushtitsa, Kritchim, Belovo, Assenovgrad can be mentioned as centres of vine-growing in this region. To the east are the vineyards near Chirpan, Stara Zagora and Sliven.

The southwestern (Melnik) vine-growing region is famous for the particular sort of vine grown here - the Melnik vine - rather than for the quantity of grapes produced. A dark-red full-bodied sweet wine called Melnik is made from it. They say it is so thick it may be carried in a handkerchief. It is much in demand both in the country and abroad.

The industrial production of wine in the country began at the beginning of the 20th c. The existing wine-cellars and private firms were later turned into modern wine-producing enterprises. Nowadays their technological equipment is very good and they produce high quality wines which are highly valued locally and internationally. Although Bulgaria has lost some of its traditional markets recently, it

is still one of the big wine exporters. The production of liqueur and table wines is encouraged alongside the production of Gumza, Dimiat, Muskat and fruit wines. The big wine-producing centres are located in the vine-growing regions of the country - Lyaskovets, Pavlikeni, Svishtov, Vidin, Rousse, Preslav, Targovishte, Shoumen, Varna, Sungurlare, Slavyantsi, Pomorie, Bourgas, Perushtitsa, Assenovgrad, Pazardzhik, Septemvri, Vetren, Karabunar, Melnik, Karlovo, etc.

There are favourable conditions for wine-maturing in high plains therefore wine-producing plants have been built in Sofia and Samokov. In Lyaskovets, Varna and Chirpan plants for the production of sparkling (champagne) wines have been built. High quality mature cognacs are made in Preslav and Pomorie. Troyan, Teteven, Gabrovo and Elena are well-known for their plum brandy and vodka is produced in Sofia, V. Tarnovo and Dobrich. Grape brandy is produced in Pomorie, Sliven and Targovishte.

## **16. Melnik**

Melnik is the smallest town in Bulgaria. It is situated on the southern slopes of the Pirin Mountains, amidst the bizarre natural forms of weathered sandstone.

When approaching the town you cannot fail to see the wall of mountains encircling it with hardheaded crags and hiding it from your view until the last moment. Then the extraordinary shapes of the surrounding sandstone formations call forth your attention and you realize you have arrived at a very special place. The town's straggling square is lined with taverns, whitewashed stone houses with timber supports embellished with flowers and vines overhanging cobbled alleys and narrow courtyards - in a word - visually Melnik is stunning, a verbal description can't give the place the credit it deserves.

Melnik has been known to historians for more than a thousand years. The Byzantines sent prominent families from Constantinople into exile here. The period of Bulgarian Middle Ages has left valuable architectural monuments. In the time of Tzar Samuil Melnik became the centre of the struggle against the heresy of the Bogomils. By the year 1200 the town was already fortified. It was then the residence of the independent feudal lord, Despot Slav, who erected several fortresses and buildings on the high plateau overlooking the town. Remains of these structures can still be traced today. During this period many churches were built. One of them, still preserved, is thought to date from the 13th century (St. Nicholas Church). Of approximately the same period are the preserved exterior walls of the so-called "Byzantine House". Later, during the Bulgarian Revival (18th and 19th centuries) Melnik grew into an important economic and cultural centre. This was due, to a certain extent, to its favourable position on the international road from Sofia to Salonika, Drama, Kavala and the whole of the Aegean region. Silk-worm breeding, vine-growing and

wine production as well as some crafts such as the goldsmith's and the tinsmith's, weaving and others were developed. The favourable climate and the fertile soil made possible the cultivation of a special sort of vine (Melnik vine) from which the well-known Melnik wine originated. In the past the wine was kept in huge casks containing up to 10 000 litres and matured in deep cellars and tunnels, dug into the sandstone below the houses or in the sides of the nearby mountains. Consequently most economic activities of this town were related to the wine trade.

In 1880 Melnik had 20 000 inhabitants (Bulgarians, Turks and Greeks), 75 churches and a thriving market called the Charshiya on the main street where camels and horses departed for foreign lands, laden with wine. The economy diminished towards the end of the century, and after the Second Balkan war of 1913, when the majority of the town's inhabitants emigrated, life almost ceased. Nowadays, despite its restored vernacular architecture, Melnik is a town where ruins outnumber inhabited houses. The town has barely 600 people living in it - involved mainly in wine-making and tourism.

Melnik's backstreets invite aimless wandering and guarantee a succession of eye-catching details. Standing above the main street's western end is the Pashov House, an impressive 19th century mansion now housing the town museum. Today it bears the name of its last owner, but it was erected in 1815 for the Ottoman feudal lord Ibrahim Bei. Built on a high spot on the left bank of the brook called Rozhen, the house consists of two storeys. There is a big cobbled passage with rooms on both sides of it on the ground floor. The western half of the house is raised into a semi-storey by a few steps and comprises an open verandah and two rooms.

A single flight of stairs placed in the axis of the entrance leads to the large hall upstairs. There are four rooms on each side of it and one more at the back. The rooms are richly decorated with wood-carved ceilings, wall ornaments, marble fire-places and various furniture. In the north-eastern corner of the upper floor is the family bathroom, with an adjacent room for the heater. The museum exhibits photos, engravings of old Melnik, men's outfits and ladies' garments, furniture and other everyday objects. Housed in the upstairs rooms they

reveal the life and atmosphere in the town at the turn of the century.

The architecture of the house is typical of the Revival Period - on the solid stone built ground floor rests the white plastered front of the top floor, crowned with two triangular pediments.

The single surviving wall of Melnik's oldest ruin - known as the Bolyar House - is sited on a hill overlooking the main street. The house was built between the tenth and fourteenth centuries with defence in mind. It was probably the residence of Melnik's 13th century bolyar, Alexei Slav, who invited rich Greeks to settle here, thereby ensuring investment in the town in the form of businesses, churches and residences. Many of these now lie in ruins, although several churches still survive to serve their tiny congregations - among them, the unadorned basilica of St. Anton just below.

Opposite the Bolyar house a narrow alley takes you up the hill to Melnik's 18th century metropolitan church, St. Nicholas. Its exterior is characterized by the two-headed eagles which adorn its window frames and an almost minaret-like balustraded tower. Inside, a wooden bishop's throne decorated with light blue floral patterns offsets a fine iconostasis. Saint Nicholas himself is portrayed seated on a throne; and there is an 18th century John the Baptist holding his own severed head. A panel below bears a narrative sequence of paintings set in the Garden of Eden, one of which features Eve covering her modesty with what appears to be a grass skirt.

Some of the icons in the churches of Melnik, it is interesting to note, were painted by masters from Mt Athos and had a very rich decoration - they had diamonds and agates for eyes, gold ornaments, and vestments made of silk brought from Syria.

Below the church is the area of some of Melnik's most picturesque 19th century houses. Pride of place goes to the Kordopulov House, protruding from a rocky cliff above the narrow valley, its 24 windows surveying every approach. Above the ground floor, which has been turned into a folk-style establishment, the specious rooms are intimate, the reception room a superb fusion of Turkish and Bulgarian crafts with painted panelling, rows of cushioned minder (long strips of seating) lining three walls, an intricate lattice-work ceiling and a mul-

titude of stained glass windows. Kordopulov was a rich merchant of Greek extraction known for his anti-Ottoman sympathies - you can see the secret room he added to his house as a refuge for his family in case of emergency. Below ground are the cellars, enormous wooden wine barrels occupying vast caverns cut from the hillside, and connected to the vineyards to the rear of the house by a network of tunnels.

Melnik has a lot to offer to the visitor. It has been declared an architectural reserve with 96 listed buildings.

The winter here is mild, the average temperature in January being 2°C above zero. The climate is transitional Mediterranean, and is good for chronic non-specific lung, kidney and rheumatic conditions.

The two-star Hotel Melnik has 33 rooms, a restaurant, a bar, souvenir shop and an exchange bureau. The wine-cellar features the legendary Melnik wine. Apart from the hotel, accommodation can also be had in three restored houses with a total of 50 beds, and also in private guest homes.

### *The Rozhen Monastery*

The Rozhen monastery is situated in beautiful surroundings, on a grassy plateau which offers splendid views of the sandstone hills around, some 6 km to the north of Melnik. It looks small and homely and inviting despite its austere outward appearance.

It was built by the local feudal lord Alexis Slav in the 13th century on the site of ancient pagan shrines, and since then it has survived looting and burning many times. The monastery was a spiritual and literary centre during the Ottoman domination. A school of calligraphy functioned here during the 14th century, which produced the manuscript "Interpretation of Job" with 117 miniatures, today to be found in the Church of the Holy Sepulchre in Jerusalem.

The monastery and all its buildings acquired its present form in the late 18th century. The irregular courtyard is intimate and unadorned, save for the wooden supports of the canopy of vines. The woodwork of the living quarters display the finesse found at Rila. The premises of the monks point to the ascetic monastic life through the

ages. Only the coloured rugs and cushions bring in a little warmth to the humble furnishings. The leading clergy, as was everywhere the case, led a somewhat softer life, enjoying the use of silver coffee sets and book-holders inlaid with mother of pearl.

The monastery is dedicated to the “Mother of God’s Nativity” and its name derives from the ancient form of the word “roden”, meaning “born”. Of particular interest is the Church of the Nativity which was renovated in 1732. It is a three-nave pseudo-basilica with a narthex and an open gallery to the south and west. It is built of stone, with a belt of bricks. The walls abound in biblical scenes (over 150 themes) and images. The oldest murals are those in the monastery’s ossuary, St. John the Precursor. The murals on the outside represent the Judgement Day in which the righteous are assisted up one side of the ladder by angels, while sinners, attempting to climb the other side are tossed by demons into the mouth of a large red serpent. The torments of hell are vividly depicted on the right, where the damned meet their horrible end. Inside the narthex, delicately restored murals include the varied sea-beasts of a Miraculous Draught of fishes, and a splendid Dormition of the Virgin. The icons of the Madonna and Child and St. John the Precursor along with the stained glass of 1715 are the only works of their kind in Bulgaria. The endless ranks of saints covering the walls of the church are dominated by a magnificent iconostasis, the work of Debur artisans. Flowers, birds and fishes swirl about the richly coloured icons, and the whole screen-unusually wide in proportion to its height - is a triumph of the woodcarver’s art.

## 17. The Black Sea

The Black Sea forms the eastern boundary of Bulgaria for a distance of 240 miles (386 km) - from Romania in the north to Turkey in the south. At first the coast is low and runs south. Then at Cape Kaliakra it turns west, cutting into the Balkan massif and the coastline achieves its most characteristic outline - the ridge of the eastern part of the Balkan Mountains slopes down to Cape Emine - Bulgaria's stormiest cape. At the bay of Bourgas the coast turns east round the Strandzha massif and the coastline achieves its most characteristic outline - the wooded spurs of the Strandzha project into the sea, forming rocky headlands which separate large bays, offering some of the most beautiful semi-deserted sandy beaches, edged with dunes at some places; or form small, picturesque coves. Several rivers, rising in the Strandzha, flow into the Black Sea. The estuary of the Ropotamo River is particularly scenic. Reaching the sea, it turns into a sluggish river, whose banks are overgrown with oaks, beech trees, willows and creeping lianas. The largest of the Bulgarian rivers, flowing into the Black Sea, near whose beautiful estuary there is a large resort, is the Kamchia. Groves of conifers cover the sandy coastal hills whereas the foothills of the Strandzha and the Stara planina, descending to meet the sea, are covered with deciduous woods.

The water of the Black Sea consists of two quite separate layers. The depths have always been low in oxygen, very salty and practically no life can exist there. Only the thin upper layer, rich in oxygen and with a low salt content, is capable of sustaining life. It is the habitat of the Black Sea flora and fauna. The fish found in the sea include mackerel, mullet, turbot, anchovy, sardine, scad and sprat. There are also dolphins, mussels, oysters and crayfish. Seals can be seen in the caves under Cape Kaliakra and Cape Maslen. However, twentieth-century pollution is making the upper layer thinner and thinner. The Black Sea

as a whole is in a sorry state. Big rivers such as the Don, Dniestr, Dniepr and Danube carry a lot of waste products into a sea which is largely closed - the change of water is only through the Bosphorus to the south. Thus pollution, as well as the intensive fishing going on, threaten to reduce even more the fish and animals this once-rich sea contained. Dolphins, once a common sight off the Bulgarian shore, are very rare nowadays. Speaking of pollution, it should be mentioned that of all seaside towns, Bourgas is with the greatest environmental problem due to Neftochim PLC - the vast oil refinery on the western outskirts of the town and to the tankers and cargo ships, frequenting the port. However, the coastal waters around Nessebar or Sozopol are pure and transparent. There are no dangerous fish and animals in the Black Sea, and, since it is practically tideless, shallow, with a sandy bottom, gradually sloping into the sea, it is ideal for swimming and practising water sports.

The Bulgarian Black Sea coast has a mild, maritime climate. In summer the average daily duration of sunshine is more than 10 hours and in May and September it is at least 8 hours. There are very few cloudy days, the rainfall is moderate, scarce in the summer months, and the mean monthly air and water temperatures in May and October are 15°-16°C, in June and September - 20.5°-21.5°C, and in July and September about 23°-24°C, that is the temperature range is relatively small. The mean monthly temperatures in autumn are higher than those in spring. Summer is long by the sea. The breezes make the hot summer days cooler and more pleasant.

There are a lot of mineral springs along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. Their curative waters have been put to good use and some seaside resorts offer both recreation and spa treatment. Mention should also be made of the curative mud at Pomorie, renowned for its therapeutic mud baths nowadays.

A lot of the settlements along the coast of Bulgaria were founded in the 7th-6th c. BC by Greeks from Asia Minor. Driven away from their home towns by overpopulation and political upheaval, they established a string of colonies first along the coast of northern Turkey, then on the shores of what is today Bulgaria, Romania and the Ukraine. Pioneers in colonizing the Black Sea coast were the Greeks from

Miletus (a city-state on the Aegean coast of Turkey). Apollonia (now Sozopol) was Miletus's first colony on the Bulgarian coast, soon followed by Odessos (Varna), Anchialos (Pomorie) and Krounoi (Balchik). Mesembria (Nessebar) was founded by Greeks from the mainland city of the Megara. At first the ancient Greeks called the sea the Axeinos, meaning "inhospitable" sea. Having settled down, they renamed it Euxinos - "hospitable", which remained its name throughout the Classical era. Apart from the towns like Nessebar and Sozopol, offering picturesque beauty, a relaxing fishing-village atmosphere and ancient sights, along the Black Sea coast there are large purpose-built resorts like Albena, Golden Sands, Sunny Beach, etc. The main resort-city is Varna - the liveliest place on the coast.

## **18. Bulgarian Seaside Resorts**

The Black Sea coast of Bulgaria has been generously endowed with picturesque beauty and plenty of sunshine. Long golden beaches are lapped by the clear blue waters of a sea, free of tides or dangerous fish and animals. Its sandy bottom slopes gently, making it perfectly safe for swimming and other water sports. These and other prerequisites have been considered and the Bulgarian coast has been developed for tourism. A number of purpose-built resorts have sprung up along the 378-kilometre long coastal strip. They are attractive not only in the summer but in the other seasons as well - the climate is mild, the sea is calm, there are a lot of clear, sunny days. The Bulgarian coast is dotted with mineral springs whose curative waters have been put to good use and some of the hotels offering spa treatment, stay open all the year round. Nowadays all facilities in the resorts are expected to go through a period of refurbishment and reconstruction as part of a programme of privatization and thus become more competitive and attractive. As a result of the initiative of enterprising entrepreneurs new restaurants and hotels have appeared. Most of them offer high standards of equipment and service.

Rousalka, the site of which was developed for tourism in 1968, is the northernmost of the Bulgarian seaside resorts. Its name is the Bulgarian for "mermaid". It consists of more than 600 small villas and is divided into three sections: a residential area, an area, comprising the offices and the third area with all sports and entertainment facilities. In accordance with a contract between the former Bulgarian Committee for Tourism and the French Club Mediterrane the resort is used by holidaymakers from France, Belgium, Italy and Switzerland. Rousalka occupies the coast of Taukliman, "Bay of Birds" in Turkish. Thousands of migratory birds use the lakes of the Dobroudzha coast as a transit station in spring and autumn. South of the resort there is a salt lake

whose bottom is covered with dark curative mud containing hydrogen sulphide. It is a natural mud-curative bath.

About 30 km north of Varna, not far from the Romanian border, at the foot of green hillsides, is the resort of Albena. It is said to be Bulgaria's most modern and stylish resort. The eye-catching architecture of its about 40 hotels fits the excellent setting perfectly. The hotels have an original terrace-like design and all their rooms have a view of the sea. The resort comprises 3 campsites. The magnificent sandy beach is about 7 km long. The sea here is shallow and very calm most of the time which allows bathers to wade up to a distance of a hundred metres. The hustling centre of Albena has two bazaar-style shopping centres, lots of pavement cafes and kiosks, selling ice-cream, fruit and hand-made souvenirs.

The Dobroudzha, Druzhba, Elitsa and the Praga are among the best hotels in the resort. The Dobroudzha Hotel, situated close to the beach, boasts a fully equipped health centre offering a variety of treatments and advice on health care. A sauna, swimming pool and a gym are at the disposal of the guests throughout the year.

The hotel has a good range of fun spots and dining facilities which applies to the resort in general. Fun-lovers and sports fans are offered increased scope to indulge themselves in Albena. The Gorski Tzar (Forest King) is a nightclub in a woodland setting. The Arabella Bar is housed in a caravel-like ship on the beach. Other lively night spots are the Ribarska Hizha (Fisherman's Hut) and the Stariyat Dub (Old Oak Tree). At night holidaymakers can try their luck in the new casino. Excellent folk-style taverns and restaurants such as the Slavyanski Kut (Slav Corner) and the Starobulgarski Stan Restaurant in the woods present tourists with an opportunity to taste Bulgarian cuisine in appropriate setting to the accompaniment of live folk music. The delightful Orehite (Picnic) Restaurant features unforgettable bare-foot dancing on glowing embers. The Chinese Restaurant and the Ramayana Indian Restaurants are happy to cater for the wishes of those who prefer exotic food.

As for sports, the list is long and includes water-skiing, sailing, motor boats, pedaloes, parascending, mini-golf, tennis, bowling, horseriding, etc. Special facilities are provided for children - a "bounc-

ing" castle, pools, water-slides, play-grounds with swings, slides, marry-go-rounds and a lot more.

Mini-trains run round the resort all day and there is a regular bus service to Varna, Golden Sands and the nearby town of Dobrich.

Zlatni Pyassatsi (Golden Sands) has always been among Bulgaria's most popular seaside resorts. It lies 25 km north of Varna and is brilliantly landscaped into some of the country's most attractive woodland and seaside scenery.

The beach is about 60 m wide and stretches for over 4 km. The average temperature in July is 22°C. A pleasant breeze prevents the heat from becoming stifling in the summer. Winter is mild and is recommended for rest, especially for elderly people and convalescents.

The construction of the resort began in 1956 and went through three stages. During the first stage smaller two-floor hotels were built along the beach. Tall hotels amidst the wood were erected during the second stage and several big luxury hotels on the seafront completed the third stage. Today Golden Sands has more than 70 hotels some of which are the Preslav, Morsko Oko, Metropol, Shipka, Glarus, etc. Several hotels like the Ambassador, which is among the most popular ones, stay open throughout the year. It is well-located in the southern part of the resort and is equipped with a balneological centre and a gym as well as two swimming pools - outdoor and indoor ones.

Pleasant experiences and memorable nights are in store for the resort's guests in its restaurants, nightclubs, coffee bars and gambling casino. Several shopping centres, an open-air theatre, a yacht club and a variety of sports facilities are at their disposal. The resort's lively discos and karaoke bars are favourite with younger visitors who love dancing the night away. Some of the great night venues are the Astoria Nightclub/Disco, the Bar Shipka, the Ruska Troyka Nightclub, the Forest Feast, etc. At the folk taverns and restaurants one can get a flavour of the real Bulgarian lifestyle - the Vodenitsa (Watermill) Restaurant with live music, the colourful Kosharata (Sheepfold) Restaurant whose walls are decorated with sheepskins and other objects associated with sheepbreeding, the Stariyat Dub Restaurant. The pleasant Paradiso Restaurant is a must. The Chernomore Yachting Club and the Corsair Restaurant offer seafood. The Stara (Old) Varna

Restaurant offers typical old Varna dishes, the Atlas Tavern - specialties from North Bulgaria and the Preslav Tavern - from the Strandzha Mountains. A number of ethnic restaurants have been opened lately. The Horse Picnic Restaurant is new and very attractive with its terrific two-hour show featuring horses, stuntmen, dancers and magicians.

There is an exciting choice of sports in Golden Sands - tennis, mini-golf, horseriding. At the yacht club tourists may hire jet skis, sail and motor boats, pedaloes. There are facilities for practising water-skiing, wind-surfing, cycling and bowling. The resort also features under-water diving courses.

Regular buses link Golden Sands with Varna and the resorts of St. Constantine and Albena.

Very near Golden Sands, south of it, is Bulgaria's latest tourist development on the Black Sea Coast - the resort of Riviera. Its main attractions are the magnificent parkland scenery, the glorious beach and the superb hotels. Riviera used to be the exclusive preserve of Bulgarian Communist Party and state leaders as well as of their international guests. Therefore all of its six hotels are furnished to a very high standard. There are five restaurants in the hotels, a nightclub, an air-conditioned disco and a couple of attractive hotel bars. A popular fish restaurant is situated right on the beach.

Riviera boasts excellent tennis courts, bowling alleys, a mineral water swimming pool and a wide range of water sports facilities. It is very near Golden Sands and the great selection of sports as well as entertainment on offer there, is within easy reach.

St. Constantine is the recently restored name of Bulgarian's oldest seaside resort. This site used to contain a few rest homes and a sanatorium. The place was named St. Constantine after the monastery built on this site in the 18th century.

The development of the resort began in 1946 when its name was changed into Druzhba (Friendship) as it was known until 1989. Although the name has been changed, the relaxing unhurried place is still the same and the superb Grand Hotel Varna, right in the middle of the resort, is still one of the best hotels in the country. St. Constantine has delightful sandy beaches, hidden rocky coves and a pleasant wooded setting. It is within easy reach of the much larger resort of Golden Sands.

As it was said earlier the Grand Hotel Varna is the best of the resort's about 20 hotels. It has an impressive range of facilities and services. It is the centre of a "family" of hotels, including the Prostor and Lebed, the three of them sharing the same extensive grounds. The two smaller hotels' guests may use all facilities available at the Grand Hotel and there are lots of them indeed - tennis courts, two swimming pools-indoor and outdoor, a bowling alley, squash courts, football and basketball playgrounds, a sauna, a complete balneological centre offering the best of equipment and medical attention.

The Rubin, Chaika and Koral are some of the other hotels in the resort. A small holiday village of about 24 semi-detached bungalows is situated close to the road into the resort. The bungalows are self-catering, with one or two bedrooms, a kitchenette and dining area and a terrace with table and chairs. The village has a central reception area and attractive gardens. It is complete with a fish restaurant, snack bar and a grocery store.

For a resort of its size St. Constantine has a good supply of shops and kiosks apart from those in the Grand Hotel. The best nightlife centres and restaurants are in the Grand Hotel again. It also has a casino and a Bulgarian tavern called Melnik. Speaking of folk-style restaurants, mention should be made of Bulgarska Svatba (Bulgarian Wedding), Sedemte Odai (The Seven Rooms), Manastirska Izba (Monastery Cellar). The resort is well-connected to Varna and the nearby resorts of Golden Sands and Albena.

Just about a twenty-minute walk from St. Constantine there is a small and charming resort called Sunny Day. Like Riviera, it is a new tourist development on the Bulgarian coast. It used to be called Emerald Park, a name which fully describes the lushness of the scenery. In addition to its quiet and restful atmosphere, Sunny Day takes pride in the high standard of its spa facilities - the mineral waters in the region are generally recognized as being among the best in the world with proven curative powers. The medical centres in the hotels attract international recognition for the treatment of a variety of conditions and disorders - from weight loss to kidney and heart trouble. The hotels are attractively designed, with bars, cafes and restaurants. The Marina and the Palas have balneological centres, mineral-water pools, sports centres with saunas.

Sunny Day has two tennis courts. Pedaloes, surfing boards and water skis are available for hire. The hotels offer gyms with saunas, mineral-water pools, table tennis facilities.

Forty kilometres north of Bourgas is Bulgaria's largest seaside resort Slanchev Bryag. The name Sunny Beach is a literal translation of the Bulgarian name. There couldn't be a more appropriate name for a place with an average summer temperature between 22° and 25°C and very few cloudy days. The resort stretches along a large bay from the green foothills of the Stara Planina Mountains to the picturesque town of Nessebar. Its beach, offering a six-kilometre long expanse of fine, golden sand, sloping gradually into the warm and safe sea, makes it an ideal resort for families. The wooded surrounding area is perfect for hiking. It was because of these natural conditions that the place was chosen for the site of a large resort in 1958. It was built in three stages. During the first stage the bungalows and smaller hotels were built. The bulk of the hotels were erected during the second stage and the most luxurious ones are the most recent.

Sunny Beach has more than a hundred hotels, quite a number of which are situated very conveniently on the very beach or within a short distance from it. Some of the biggest and best-appointed hotels are the Kuban, Globus, Bourgas, Evropa. The first three mentioned as well as the Pomorie and Diamant stay open round the year. Autumn is particularly beautiful and pleasant here, with a lot of sunshine and warm days. Winter is mild with rare snowfall. In addition, the Bourgas and Globus hotels have indoor swimming pools and fully equipped health centres.

The lists of treatments offered are very long - of diseases of the limbs and joints, neurosis, mental fatigue, obesity, etc. The centres are staffed with highly qualified specialists. More than 25 procedures are on offer in them - sauna, underwater massage, physiotherapy.

At the northern end of the resort there are two campsites - Slanchev Bryag and Emona. Most of the hotels in Sunny Beach have their own restaurants, bars and cafes. In addition, the resort boasts some very good folk-style restaurants as well as lively places of entertainment. At folk-style establishments like the Fountain (Chuchura), the Barrel (Buchvata), Strandzhata tourists can enjoy authentic

Bulgarian dishes in an appropriate setting. Live music entertains guests at most of them and some feature folk floor-shows.

Taking the name of the Bulgarian word for “barrel”, Buchvata is distinctively shaped - it is a big keg. The Khan’s Tent (Hanska Shatra) is a restaurant, built on a high hill, with a panoramic view of the resort. The Southern Nights (Yuzhni Noshti) features a captivating floor-show of Gipsy and oriental songs and dances. The Oasis is another oriental restaurant. The Frigate is a seafood restaurant on board a 19th-century frigate, driven ashore. The Bombata Restaurant, right on the beach, is another seafood restaurant. For gourmets Sunny Beach has two Chinese restaurants, restaurants offering French and Indian cuisine, English specialities and beer in typical English setting.

Sunny Beach has a lot of beach snack bars, pavement cafes and stalls, selling fruit and vegetables as well as all kind of goods.

Plenty of entertainment is provided for the young and agile at the discotheques.

The Bar Variety Nightclub, located close to the Fenix and Pomorie hotels, offers spectacular cabaret floor-shows and a gambling casino.

The resort has a lot of shops, street stalls and bazaars. As for shopping, there is always the possibility to visit the neighbouring towns of Nessebar and Pomorie or Bourgas and Varna, to all of which there are regular bus connections. Around the resort, which is a bit spread out, there is mini-train transport. Bikes, rickshaws and horse-and donkey-driven carts can be hired.

Sunny Beach has a lot to offer to those who are keen on sports - swimming pools, tennis courts, mini-golf courses and a bowling alley vary the pace of beach life here. The yacht club offers motor boats, mini-jets and pedaloes for hire.

Horseback riding is made possible too because of the excellent horseriding school at the resort, offering courses for beginners and advanced riders. All kinds of sports equipment can be hired at the hotels as well as chess sets, backgammon, dominoes.

There are excellent conditions for lively children in Sunny Beach - playgrounds with slides and swings, children’s pools, water slides enjoyed by adults as well. Like Albena and Golden Sands,

Sunny Beach is a bearer of the prestigious BLUE FLAG prize for proven ecological advantages along the Black Sea coast. The three resorts have long been in possession of all that makes them worthy of this certificate - clean sea water, air and sun which carry absolutely no risk to the health of the tourists; architecture, adapted to the natural environment; no automobile traffic within the resorts; quietness and a lot of greenery.

Further up the coast, about 7 km north of Sunny Beach is Elenite Holiday Village which opened in 1985. It is roughly divided into two colonies of two-storey villas clustered around amenities one would normally expect to find in a classy holiday centre. Situated between a mountain massif and the sea shore around a large bay the villas face a beautiful stretch of clean sandy beach and the sparkling blue sea. Like the other holiday villages Elenite has sprung up to meet the growing demand for holidays of more privacy and comfort. This is exactly what the self-contained villas offer. Each comprises two large and well-appointed sea-facing studios, with a terrace on the ground floor and a balcony on the first one. The studios have separate entrances and are more or less of the same design. But the villas in zone A unlike those in zone B, have kitchenettes with cooking facilities. The Emona Hotel is perched on a hill in the north-eastern part of the village. Although it is called a hotel, it consists of villa accommodation like the rest of the village. It has its own reception area and other amenities including an attractive restaurant and a day bar. A new hotel in the northern part has just opened and another one, much larger, is being built in the southern part. The two zones of villas share a reception located in the Service Centre which comprises restaurants with indoor and outdoor dining, conference halls, bars, a gym, etc. The speciality restaurant The Fishing Net (Talyana) in the centre of the village tempts tourists with fish dishes. The Old Oak Tavern (Stariyat Dub) is attractively designed and offers a varied selection of wines and beers. For those who prefer preparing their own meals Elenite has a well-stocked supermarket in the shopping centre.

Elenite is superbly equipped for sports enthusiasts. It has a sea-water pool for adults and another one for children, a sauna, three tennis courts, a gym. The list of water sports tourists can practise in

Elenite is long. In addition, they can enjoy horseriding, table tennis, beach volleyball. Darts, games, bingo and family videos are loved by both adults and children. Elenite is well-linked with Sunny Beach which has a lot to offer to its guests.

South of Bourgas the 150-kilometre long coastline offers a remarkably well-preserved natural environment and superb conditions for a restful holiday. In this excessively urbanized century the wild charm of the southern shore has remained unspoilt. Some of Bulgaria's most glorious semi-deserted sandy beaches with dunes stretch in the south. The landscape is incredibly varied. The beaches are punctuated by romantic rocky coves where the wooded slopes of the Strandzha descend to meet the sea. The estuaries of the Ropotamo and the other rivers flowing into the sea are particularly scenic. The fine combination of sea, woodland and mountain attracts a lot of young holiday-makers. This part of the coast is known as Campers' Paradise. But among the old pine, oak and cypress trees is the Dyuni Holiday Village whose architecture merges with the scenery. During the construction period (the complex was built by a Finnish firm in 1987) the natural beauty of the bay was the designers' most important consideration. The job of the architects was to build a high-class holiday village. It is divided into three main areas - the Marina Village, Hotel Pelikan and the Central Village, also known as Zelenika. Holidaymakers can stay in comfortable twin-bedded rooms in the Pelikan Hotel, built in the style of the Bulgarian monasteries, or in the Bisser Hotel (Marina village). The accommodation in the Central Village is either in smaller hotels or in three-bedded apartments with their own living-rooms and kitchenettes. There are several restaurants scattered throughout the village, including one offering traditional Bulgarian cuisine in the Central Village, the Old Vine Tavern (also there), the Sailor's Inn Tavern in the Marina Village, the restaurant at the Pelikan Hotel with indoor and outdoor dining areas. A lot of bars around the resort, a disco and a nightclub at the Pelikan Hotel present guests with an opportunity to enjoy nightlife. Dyuni has an excellent sports centre close to the Central Village with swimming pools (including one for children), a children's playground, seven tennis courts (two of them floodlit) plus all sorts of watersports facilities - for wind-surf-

ing, yachting, water-skiing, fishing, etc. Horseriding is also available.

The holiday village caters for the need of holidays where everything is more natural and pleasant than in the big seaside resorts.

The modern complex of Duyni excepted, Bulgaria's southern Black Sea coast offers comparatively cheap accommodation in private rooms in quiet seaside towns like Primorsko, Tsarevo and Ahtopol as well as in campsites. Near Primorsko there is a holiday resort which used to be called Georgi Dimitrov International Youth Centre and was built for students' holidays but is no longer used for that purpose. It comprises several hotels, restaurants, discotheques and nightclubs. A couple of open-air, snack bars cater for the tourists, still drawn here by the vast expand of sand. The resort is hopefully going to be developed into something better.

## 19. Bourgas

Bourgas is the fourth largest town in Bulgaria and has the largest port. It is the chief town of a region which occupies an area of 14 656 sq. km, its population being about 870 000 people. The region is famous for its seaside resorts, vast vineyards, production of white wines and several large industrial enterprises.

Bourgas occupies the innermost part of the largest bay on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast which stretches from Cape Emine to the north and Cape Kokare to the south. The bay is well protected from the winds and is a natural harbour. The small and rocky island of St. Anastasia is 7 km from Bourgas in the southern part of the bay. It was named after a monastery built there in the distant past. After the liberation from Ottoman rule the monastery was abandoned by the church authorities. A lighthouse was built on the island later. Subsequently, it was turned into a prison. In 1945 it was given the name of Bolshevik and was the site of a small museum. Its old name has been restored lately.

Three lagoon lakes surround Bourgas. Lake Atanasovo is situated midway between Pomorie and Bourgas. It is a nature reserve and serves as the midway point on the "Via Pontica" - the route used by birds migrating between Scandinavia and Africa. Lake Bourgas is the largest of the three lakes. It is separated from the bay of Bourgas by the road to Sozopol. Situated 10 km further south, Lake Mandra is the most beautiful one and is a good place to watch wild fowl.

Bourgas is 120 km south of Varna and about as far from the border with Turkey. It lies at a distance of about 400 km from Sofia, the capital of Bulgaria.

The site of Bourgas was inhabited in ancient times. Thracian remains and Greek pottery have been discovered, bearing witness to that fact. In Roman times there were towers that protected the road to

nearby Deultum. One of them might have given its name to the town. The present name is derived from the Latin "burg" or the Greek "pir-gos", both meaning "tower". But as a town Bourgas did not develop until the 17th century. It was founded by fishermen from Pomorie and Sozopol who settled here. At the time of Bulgaria's Liberation from the Turks in 1878 it was a small town with no more than 5 000 inhabitants. It soon began growing into a commercial town. It was connected with the interior of the country by a railway line in 1890. The port was built in 1903. A number of industrial enterprises, banks, foreign firms and consulates were established.

Nowadays Bourgas is an important industrial centre with the biggest port on the Bulgarian Black Sea coast. It has been enlarged and equipped with modern installations. There is a ship - building yard. Bourgas is much more industrial than its neighbours on the coast with its plants and factories producing electric cables, cotton textiles, soap, sugar products, foodstuffs, etc. There is also a winery, a brewery and a factory specializing in soft drinks. Neftochim PLC - an oil refinery and a number of associated chemical plants - is the largest industrial enterprise in the district. Imported oil is processed and various fuels, plastics, fibres and rubber are produced. However, due to the presence of Neftochim PLC on the western outskirts of the town, Bourgas is ill-famed for its ecological problems. The air pollution is one of the highest in the country. The seawater in the bay does not boast the purity and transparency of that near Nessebar and Sozopol as a result of the release of waste products and oil from the tankers and cargo ships in the bay. Since 1989 some changes have occurred and the management of Neftochim are doing their best to decrease the waste products dumped into the bay and reduce the pollution of the air. Still, Bourgas and its inhabitants are faced by a very serious environmental problem, which has ruined the town's reputation as a seaside resort. And it is a pity because the beach is long and sheltered, covered with fine, dark sand which heats up quickly because of its iron content and is recommended for rheumatic sunbathers.

Bourgas is a cultural and educational centre. Its important institutions include an archeological museum, a state library, a state theatre, an opera company, a symphony orchestra, a state art gallery with a fine

collection of 18th and 19th c. icons, a number of private galleries and a puppet theatre. The seaside gardens contain an open-air theatre and a lot of cafes, restaurants and children's playgrounds. There are two universities in the town as well as several colleges, language and technical schools.

Being one of the youngest towns on the Black Sea coast, Bourgas has few historical sights. Near Bourgas's main promenading area along Alexandrovska Street and Bogoridi Street the Church of SS Kiril i Methodii rises. It was built between 1894 and 1905. The Saints are depicted above the entrance, framed by some interesting stained glass. The nearby Ethnographic Museum displays Kukeri costumes and regional textiles. The Natural History Museum contains displays documenting the local flora and fauna. Along Bogoridi Street is the Archealogical Museum showing off votive tablets depicting the Thracian Horseman, Classical-era burial finds, including the gold jewellery of a Thracian priestess, a Greek-language inscription from Mesembria, recording a peace treaty between the city and the local Thracian ruler Sadala, etc.

A few examples of the turn of the century architecture have been preserved in the town centre where most of the daytime activity takes place. Alexandrovska Street is the main shopping street whereas Bogoridi Street, leading from the centre to the sea gardens, is lined with outdoor cafes and restaurants.

Bourgas is a stopover point for tourists nowadays rather than a seaside resort. The town has good transport connections. Accommodation is offered in its three big hotels - the Bulgaria, the Kosmos and the Primorets as well as in private rooms and hotels. There are a few travel agencies and exchange bureaux.

## 20. Nessebar

Three kilometers south of Slanchev Bryag a narrow isthmus (causeway) connects the old town of Nessebar with the mainland onto which it has extended recently. Nowadays about 3000 of the town's 7000 inhabitants live on the peninsula, the rest on the mainland. Nessebar depends mainly on tourism. Fishing is still a livelihood for a large number of people living here, but Nessebar's fleet cannot employ enough of its population. Nessebar's quaint atmosphere is due to its picturesque situation, to the coastal nineteenth-century architecture, the best of which has been preserved, and to its unique collection of medieval churches. The new construction has been carefully designed to match the well-preserved older houses on both sides of narrow cobbled streets.

Nessebar's importance as a one-time mercantile power and city-state belongs to a distant past. First the site of the Nessebar was occupied by a Thracian settlement. In the 6th c. BC the natives were ejected by Greek colonists from the Greek mainland city of Megara. It soon grew rich from trade. It exported wheat, timber and ores, bought from the Thracians, and imported fine pottery, jewellery, clothes, wine and olive oil from Greece. The town was fortified. Temples and public buildings were erected. It minted its own bronze and silver coins. Its name was Mesembria. Trade rivalry was the reason for the frequent fights with the neighbouring towns of Apollonia and Anchialos. However, when threatened by the Romans in the 1st c. BC, they allied against their common enemy.

Mesembria fell to the Romans in the year 72 BC. The town lost its importance and turned into a minor port in the Roman province of Thrace. But in the 5th and 6th centuries AD it flourished again as a strategic, commercial and religious centre of the Byzantine Empire. It became the stop-off point for ships travelling between the Danube and

Constantinople. The walls, whose remains can still be seen were reconstructed. New churches and public buildings were erected. The Slavic incursions and the foundation of the Bulgarian state in 681 made Byzantium use Nessebar as a base in its wars against them. In 812 the Bulgarians led by Khan Kroum seized it for the first time. The warlike Bulgarians captured tons of booty, including the formula for "Greek fire" - a highly explosive mixture on which the Byzantines relied for their military superiority over the "Barbarians". In the Middle Ages Nessebar passed from Byzantine to Bulgarian ownership several times but commerce and culture continued to flourish whoever was in control. It was already known as Nessebar as the Slavs called the town. The remains of several beautifully decorated churches, dated from the Medieval period, bear witness to the architectural achievements of that time. And, indeed, by the number of its churches Nessebar came second after Veliko Tarnovo in Medieval Bulgaria. There were more than 40 of them of which only seven are comparatively well preserved and there are remains of another eight.

Nessebar fell to the Turks in 1453. Under their rule it remained the seat of a Greek Bishopric and an important centre of Greek culture. This accounts for the survival of some its churches. However, by the end of the 19th c. the population of Nessebar had already been much reduced. It made a living by importing wood from the Lower Danube and building humble caiques.

The situation of old Nessebar on a small, rocky peninsula has predetermined its architecture. The limited space did not allow the construction of big houses with large courtyards as in other parts of Bulgaria. The ground floor is built of undressed stone and is usually used for storage. The upper floor, built of wood, projects over the narrow street to gain space. The vine-arbours and the figtrees in the small courtyards complete the romantic atmosphere of the town. The old Nessebar's houses make the place unforgettable. The architectural ensembles near the Old Bishopric and the Church of St. John Aliturgetos have been restored to prolong the life of those century-old treasures and to remind of the past of the town. All new constructions on the peninsula has been designed in such a way as to blend with the old houses, typical of the 19th-century coastal architecture. The stone-

made ground floor is with built-in beams. A two-winged gate leads to the cellar, used as a store-room and a drying house for the fish. The entrance room is usually situated 2-3 steps higher and is accessible from the cellar and the yard. A flight of stairs leads to a large hall on the upper floor and two or three rooms, a larder and a store-room lead off the hall. The upper floor projects over the ground floor on two or three sides and its bay windows form characteristic turns and recesses.

As it was said earlier, Nessebar was fortified by the Greeks and fragments of Hellenic-period walls can be seen beneath the Romano-Byzantine fortifications at the entrance to the peninsula. The well-preserved ruins of the gate, through which the town was once entered, suggest that it must have opened vertically. The massive walls, which used to encircle the whole of the town almost until recently, were linked by four-cornered and round towers, jutting out considerably. Just inside the town on the right is the Archaeological Museum, including more evidence of the Nessebar's classical past. From the entrance the town's main artery leads to the first of its magnificent churches - the reddish Church of Christ the Pantocrator.

There is historical evidence of the existence of more than 40 churches and two monasteries in Nessebar. Although they are usually referred to as "Byzantine" by art historians outside the country, they are reasonably regarded as masterpieces of the Bulgarian medieval architecture and art by Bulgarian archaeologists.

Bulgaria was converted to Christianity by Byzantium in 864/5. Byzantine influence was strongly felt in the religious art and church building for centuries. But in the 13th and 14th centuries, while Byzantium had political difficulties and declined, Bulgarian art and architecture developed further and established their own characteristic features. The so-called ornamental (pictorial/picturesque) architectural style, of which the churches in Nessebar of that period are good examples, is characterized by Roman bands of dressed stone and bricks, a regular succession of niches with blind arches, whose patterns are obtained by combinations of brick and stone, jagged cornices and decoration with ceramic plaques (usually glazed brilliant green). A comparatively new element is the belfry erected over the narthex. In the period between the 12th and 14th centuries, and especially under the

reign of Tzar Ivan Alexander there was a boom in Nessebar's church building. The town had its own icon-painting workshop. Its prominent citizens financed the building of new churches and the reconstruction and redecoration of the existing ones generously.

Unfortunately, only 7 of them have survived comparatively well-preserved and there are remains of a few more. They are dated from different periods - the oldest are from early Byzantine times - 5th-6th c., some from the 10th-12th c., but the bulk of them were built in the period between the 13th and 14th centuries.

### **The church of St. John Aliturgetos (Sveti Ivan Neosveteni)**

This church was not consecrated (the name Aliturgetos is the Greek for "not consecrated"). The legend says that one of the builders fell down and killed himself. The church canon did not allow a place where a man had been killed to be used for worship. But according to some records services were held in it. Unfortunately, the church was badly damaged during the 1913 earthquake. Its ruins, which can be found in the southern part of the peninsula, show that it must have been one of the most beautiful medieval churches in Nessebar. It was a domed cruciform church with an almost square naos and a three-portioned altar. To the west there was a large narthex. In the middle of the naos there were four columns which formed the crossing. The three apses of the altar were detached. The narthex was covered with a dome in the central part and tunnel vaults at the sides. It is not clear if there was a belfry above the narthex. The church(or, at least, its remains) has a rich façade decoration. The plastic decoration consists of series of large two-step niches, among which shorter and narrower niches with concave surface are placed. Over them there are stone corbels, jagged brick cornices and other architectural elements. All façade arches are of alternating stripes of stone and bricks. Coloured ceramic plaques frame all arched curves. The eastern façade with its slender niches between the apses is the most richly elaborated with limestone blocks, red bricks, crosses, mussel shells and ceramic plaques.

The church was built of mixed masonry and the bricks do not go throughout the whole thickness of the walls, which were built more carelessly on the inside. They were plastered and covered with mural paintings.

The church is an example of the ornamental style carried out to perfection.

### **The Church of St. Stefan (Sveti Stefan)**

This church was restored and enlarged several times and it is difficult to be exactly dated. The eastern part is the oldest and probably dates from the 11th c. Some centuries later it was enlarged by adding a new structure to the west. Then it was decorated with some elements of the ornamental style. The western wall was demolished much later and the present narthex was built. It became the principle church of Nessebar in the 15th c. and therefore it is also known as the New Bishopric (the New Metropolitan Church, Nova Metropolia).

It is a medieval basilica with an almost square naos. Each aisle is separated from the nave by a column and a pillar over which large arches were built. The altar consists of three apses. The church was timber-roofed. The exterior is rich in design. The eastern and the western façades are crowned with pediments in the shape of trefoil arches. The eastern façade is more elaborated. It comprises three high apses the middle of which rises above the side ones. All three are decorated with ceramic plaques. The colourful effect is achieved by the mixed masonry of stone and bricks, without keeping to any fixed pattern. The decoration of the façade gives us grounds to define this church as an example of the ornamental architectural style.

### **The Church of Christ the Pantocrator**

This church was built in the 13th or 14th c. and is a good example of the ornamental style. Imposing both in style and size, it rises in the centre of old Nessebar. It is of the domed cruciform type but has elongated proportions. Four slender columns (now demolished) used to carry a high dome. The three-portioned altar space is separated from the naos by two massive pillars. The narthex is large, with two entrances - one to the west and another one to the south. It was covered with a tunnel vault. A square belfry was built over the narthex. A narrow flight of stairs in the wall between the narthex and the naos leads to the belfry. Completed during the 14th-century reign of Tsar Ivan Alexander, the church is chiefly notable for its exterior decoration. Each façade is different. The eastern façade is more richly elaborated than the others. Its three apses, divided by slender niches, have

splendid plastic and colourful decoration. The plastic forms are fascinating: alternating niches with flat and concave surfaces, semi-circular pediments with smaller niches in them, jagged cornices, semi-columns in the corners of the dome, etc. As for the colourful effect, it is achieved by the contrast between the white stone or marble and the red bricks, the vividly coloured ceramic plaques, the frieze of swastikas (then a symbol of the sun and continual change).

In the very centre of the town, the Church of Christ the Pantocrator impresses the visitors with its unique architectural and artistic effect. It bears witness to the fact that Nessebar was the second major centre of church building in the period between the 12th and 14th centuries in Bulgaria.

**The Church of St. John the Baptist** dates from the 11th c. and is one of the best preserved and least modified churches in Nessebar. It is a domed cruciform church built of undressed stone. It has no narthex. The altar space comprising three semi-circular apses, is directly linked to the naos. Four massive pillars form the cross. The walls of the interior are smooth and unbroken. The exterior is simple and monumental. There are no decorative niches and ceramic plaques, typical of the churches of the ornamental style. Bricks were used as a decorative element over the entrances, in the jagged main cornice and around the windows. On the basis of its simple decoration and some other features this church has been dated back to the 11th c. whereas the preserved frescoes inside date from later periods - the 14th and 16th-17th centuries respectively. Nowadays the church is used as a gallery.

**The Church of the Blessed Saviour (Sveti Spas)** was built in the 17th c. and it accounts for its modest appearance. At that time Nessebar as well as the whole of Bulgaria, was under Ottoman rule. The Turks imposed some rules on church-building. They did not allow the construction of tall Christian churches. The churches had to have no belfries, to be very simple, half-dug into the earth. Bell-ringing was forbidden. All churches in Bulgaria from the period of the Ottoman rule have a similar appearance. The Bulgarians worshipped in them but they lacked the grandeur of the old churches, most of which were demolished when the Turks invaded the country. Those in Nessebar managed to survive because the town was the seat of a Greek

Bishopric and an important centre of Greek culture during the years of Ottoman domination.

**The Church of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel (Sveti Arkhangeli Mikhail i Gavrail)** was built in the 13th or 14th c. and was later badly damaged, but the preserved parts give an idea of its former architecture. It is a single-aisled church with a dome. The proportions are elongated. There is a large three-portioned altar to the east end of the nave and a pre-apsidal space. The narthex is comparatively large with two entrances to the north and to the south. A narrow flight of stairs, built in the western wall, led to the belfry. The church has a rich exterior. The façades are separated by arched niches, some of which have openings. They are decorated with brick ornaments in chessboard pattern. The masonry is mixed. There are triple lines of decorative ceramic plaques over the arches. Over this blind arcade there is a frieze of small-sized archings, embracing all four façades, which is interrupted by two big semicircular pediments. The main cornice is jagged.

**The Church of St. Paraskeva** is another example of the ornamental style, but its plan is simpler. Probably it dates from the 13th c. It was destroyed and restored several times and only its north wall is original.

### **The Old Bishopric (The Old Metropolitan Church - Stara Metropolia)**

This impressive three-aisled basilica is one of the most remarkable and comparatively well-preserved monuments of the early Byzantine church building in Bulgaria. It was built in the 6th c. AD. It is thought to have been the principal church of Nessebar until the 15th c. It is probably the oldest and most mysterious building in the town. The remains still remind of its original design and former grandeur. The planning scheme of the church possesses the typical features of a Hellenic basilica - a square naos, a single apse to the east and a narthex (three-sectioned) to the west. The aisles of the church were separated by tall stone walls with two rows of archways, places one above the other. The space between the large apse and the nave is occupied by a stage which must have been used not only for worship but also as a place where matters of importance to the town were discussed. The

huge arch of the apse was framed with bricks as were the openings of all arches. It was built of mixed masonry - stripes of undressed stone and bricks as well as red mortar. There is no plastic decoration whatsoever. Nothing but traces of ornamental mural paintings have been found on the apse. The Old Bishopric's initial appearance of a basilica with a timber roof has been considerably changed by repairs. Its original side aisles were higher than the now existing ones and had galleries. The floor was covered with mosaic. A small fragment from an older building was used in the masonry. The inscription in Greek reads: "May my call reach thee."

To the northeast of the Old Bishopric is the Church of the Virgin - the church used by the worshippers in Nessebar today. It is a comparatively new building containing a collection of icons that used to decorate the altars of the other churches in Nessebar.

Further on, on the northern tip of the peninsula, are the remains of the so called Basilica on the Seashore and a keep, which suggests how frequently this exposed church was sacked by robbers and pirates.

The murals, preserved in the churches of Nessebar, date from the period between the 14th and 18th centuries. Unfortunately, they are not many. Once the churches were richly decorated inside and contained a lot of icons. Some of the icons have travelled a lot and have found their way to various museums and galleries. Some of them can be seen in the Crypt of Alexander Nevsky Memorial Church in Sofia. Others are in the Church of the Virgin in Nessebar. As regards the mural paintings, there are some in the Church of St. John the Baptist, the Church of St. Stefan and the Church of the Blessed Saviour.

**The Church of St. Stefan** - the oldest frescoes that have survived are from the 14th c. but most of them were added later - 16th-17th c.

The patron who financed the church's enlargement in the 15th c. was given pride of place among the Forty Martyrs on the west wall. In the 16th century the church was redecorated. At that time there was a flourishing workshop for icon-painting in the town. The icon-painters were supported by rich citizens and mostly by the Bishop of Nessebar and Exarch of the whole Bulgarian Black Sea coast Hristofor. Therefore his portrait can be seen next to the entrance to the south. The

scenes of the frescoes from the 16th c. depict the life of the Virgin (to whom the church was originally dedicated) and the Miracles of Christ. The Miracles of Christ in the nave, the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin and other scenes from the life of the Virgin in the southern aisle are the work of the chief icon-painter at that time. They are notable for the realistic persuasiveness in interpreting the canonical stories, for the daring manner of composing space, for the exquisite line and the sense of colour. The traditions of the Byzantine icon-painting of the 14th c. as well as the changes that occurred at the end of the 16th c. are evident - complex symbols and strong mysticism on the one hand and realistic trends on the other.

The paintings on the eastern wall and in the narthex date from 1712. Speaking of the interior of the church we should note the bases of the marble columns which originally formed the capitals of pillars in a pagan temple. The woodcarving of the pulpit and the bishop's stall dates from 1790. The portraits of two other bishops of Nessebar - Konstantin and Makarii - can be seen in the narthex.

**The Church of St. John the Baptist** - some frescoes have been partly preserved, mainly the faded portraits of the donor and his contemporaries on the west part of the south wall and beneath the dome which date from the period when the church was built. The others date from the 16th and 17th centuries. One depicts St. Marina pulling a devil from the sea before braining it with a hammer - possibly representing local merchants' hopes that their patron would deal with the Cossack pirates who raided Nessebar during the mid-seventeenth century.

## **21. Sozopol**

Stone anchors, displayed in Sozopol's museum, suggest that traders were visiting the town's harbour as early as the 12th BC though the identity of these seafarers remains uncertain. More certain is that Apollonia Pontica, as was the ancient name of Sozopol, was the first of the Greek colonies along the Black Sea coast, founded in or around 610 BC by Greeks from the town of Miletus in Asia Minor. They named the town after Apollo, the patron of seafarers and colonists. They erected a huge bronze statue of Apollo near the harbour which could be seen from far away. The town prospered by trading Greek textiles and wine for Thracian honey, grain and copper. Apollonia's major customer was Athens. Until the 4th c. BC it was the main maritime power in the region and even established its own colonies as was the case with Anchialos, today's Pomorie. In 72 BC Apollonia was conquered and sacked by the Romans who carried off the treasured statue of Apollo. The town disappeared from the records of the chroniclers and reappeared in 431 AD under the name of Sozopolis, meaning the "City of Salvation". Under the Byzantines the town soon regained its reputation of a prosperous commercial power. There is evidence that troublesome nobles and bishops were "retired" here by emperors who did not want to punish them more severely. In the centuries to follow Sozopol shared the fate of the other Black Sea colonies and fought back many tribes. In the 15 c. AD it was invaded by the Turks and declined. Subsequently, it was replaced by Bourgas as the area's major port..

Hourly buses link Bourgas with Sozopol which is situated 35 km to the south. Like Nessebar, it divides into two parts - the old town, lying on a peninsula, and the modern one, occupying the Harmanite district (meaning "The Windmills" in English) on the mainland to the southeast. Between the two parts lies the town's park.

Like in Nessebar, there are wonderful 19th century houses in the old part of Sozopol. They are in the characteristic coastal architectural style: the upper floor, made of wood, projects over the ground floor, built of stone. The houses are high, closed to the street side. The courtyards are small, with vine-arbours and tables with chairs around, in keeping with the southern hospitality of the local Bulgarian and Greek population. In most of the houses a narrow stairway leads from a large cellar on the ground floor to the large and impressive hall on the upper floor. Until the last century the locals used to import furniture for their houses from Vienna, pieces of which can still be seen in some of the halls. Around the hall the kitchen with the fireplace, the larder, the bedrooms and the big sitting-room are arranged. Speaking of the houses in Sozopol we should mention the exquisite Zormali in the eastern part of the old town - Alexievata, Trakiiskata and Sotir Gyurovata houses, perched on the steep cliffs.

Sozopol doesn't boast Nessebar's abundance of churches. In the park among the trees is the pale sandstone Chapel of St. Zosim in honour of the saint who was the Christian equivalent of Apollo as a protector of seafarers. The whitewashed church of SS Kiril and Metodii is immediately to the north. Nowadays it is used as an exhibition hall. Opposite the church is Sozopol's Archaeological Museum containing a lot of amphorae and perhaps the best collection of Greek vases in Bulgaria. The Thracians who lived inland and mined copper, sold to the Greeks and exported by them, are remembered in an extensive collection of weapons and pottery.

North of the museum Apollonia Street leads into the old town. Several chapels can be found in the town, usually bare inside except for a picture of the saint to whom they are dedicated. Speaking of churches Sozopol's gem is the Church of the Holy Virgin, half-dug into the ground, containing probably the most beautiful wooden iconostasis along the Black Sea coast. That finely carved masterpiece, the bishop's throne and the wooden partition behind which female worshippers were required to stand, were made by unknown masters from Sozopol at the beginning of the 19th c.

Sozopol's former high school now contains a small gallery where works of local marine artists are displayed.

Sozopol is a resort town and a fishing centre nowadays. Unlike Nessebar, it offers the tranquility of fishing-village life and has a relaxing atmosphere, which has made it the favoured holiday resort of Bulgaria's literary and artistic set. Accommodation is offered in private rooms both in the old and the new towns. The bus from Bourgas passes the Zlatna Ribka campsite 3 km north of town, which is one of the best on the south Black Sea coast of Bulgaria. Sozopol abounds in cafes and restaurants. Most of the residents of Harmanite have converted their garages and gardens into cafe-aperitif bars. Cafes and taverns line the main arteries of the old town. There are numerous eating and drinking places along the main beach, offering snacks and refreshments. The Mehana Sozopol and the Vyaturna Melnitsa are folk-style restaurants with very good national cuisine, outdoor seating and live music. Perun and the Druzhba ship restaurant are good places to try grilled fish in a lively outdoor setting. There are a whole lot of family-run smaller restaurants which are worth visiting because apart from the excellent food and service, they are often much more friendly and intimate. The best of them are the Amfora which is a bit hidden in the backstreets of the old town and the Neptun, with a terrace overlooking the sea.

## 22. The Strandzha Mountains

The interior of the south Bulgarian coast is dominated by the wooded Strandzha, a region of plateaux and hills interrupted by rift valleys, where the Ropotamo, Veleka and other rivers flow. It is an extensive range of mountains 164 mls (270 km) long and 55 mls (90 km) wide. Only the north-eastern section lies in Bulgaria. The rest of the mountains lie in Turkey. Their highest peak in Bulgaria is Golyamo Gradishte - 2 130 ft (710 m) high.

The mountains are not very high but the scenery is magnificent. The estuaries of their rivers, flowing into the Black Sea, offer spectacular exotic views. Their wooded spurs form picturesque coves along the coast. The untouched forests are thick with oak, beech, alder and elm trees and would be perfect for hiking if there were more distinct paths and enough accommodation. Wild olive, fig and plane trees, laurels, cypresses, pomegranates and box, which can also be found here, add to the exotic charm of the mountains.

Being the habitat of deer, wild boars and cats, hares, the Strandzha range offers individual and group hunting holidays.

The mountains are sparsely populated. The main occupation of the villagers is sheep- and pig- breeding. They are also engaged in potato-growing and wood-working.

The ancient name of the range was Praroria, that is "mountains on the border". In its heart it has preserved remains of prehistoric tombs (dolmeni), ruins of ancient fortresses and temples and medieval monasteries. The mountains are unique for their folklore, songs and dances. Lying on one of the main routes to the border crossing into Turkey at Malko Tarnovo, are Kondolovo and Bulgari - villages renowned for the ancient custom of nestinarstvo, which is said to be directly descended from the Dionysian rites of the ancients and a link with the religion of the Thracians.

The Strandzha mountains were the side of an uprising called Preobrazhensko, which broke out in 1903. It spread through Lower Thrace, where the Bulgarian population was predominant. The aim of the uprising was to liberate them from the Turks, who continued to rule over these provinces after the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-78.

## 23. Early Settlers

Today's Bulgaria's territory has been inhabited since ancient times. Archaeologists have discovered traces of primitive man's life, indicating that our lands have been lived in since the Paleolithic period, i.e. the early Stone Age.

Life must have been very hard in those remote times. The Stone Age people lived in caves. They lived on hunted animals, collected fruit and the fish they caught. Traces of that period have been found in several caves in Bulgaria - Bacho Kiro, Temnata Dupka, Pobiti Kamani and Devetak. These are chipped implements of stone, flint and bone. By the end of the early Stone Age man had already got command of the fire and started tilling the land. The weapons and tools were improved, hence the living conditions at that time. People started leaving the caves where they felt secure and sheltered. They now felt more confident and capable of protecting themselves from their enemies. Their new places of living were dug-outs, covered with tree branches and grass. In the middle of this "roof" there was a primitive chimney - an outlet through which the smoke of the fire was sent away. The largest open-air settlement of the end of that period has been found near the village of Muselievo (Pleven).

During the Late Stone Age (the Neolithic period) remarkable changes in the life style of primitive people occurred. They were due to the great improvement in their tools. This led to more intensive farming. Some wild animals had already been tamed and the late Stone Age people began to breed them. At that time they started leading a more settled way of living and building their homes on both sides of narrow streets, covered with rubble, sand or wood. The dug-outs were completely abandoned. Tree branches and clay were used for building the houses. Inside they stepped on wooden floors which protected them from the damp. The beginnings of architectural planning were

laid. There was an empty space in the centre of the settlement and the streets led off it in all directions. Most of the settlements were fortified primitively. Those were the rudiments of the future towns and villages. They sprang up in areas offering the most favourable conditions - in today's South Bulgaria and Dobroudzha. In the west of our present day territory there were settlements in naturally sheltered places. There are hundreds of settlement mounds in our lands but few of them have been studied so far. One of those that have been excavated is at the village of Karanovo (Sliven). Several layers, dating from periods between the Stone and the Bronze Ages have been distinguished.

Along with the settlements some of the caves were still inhabited during the Neolithic period - Devetak near Lovech, Magura near Belogradchik, some caves in the valley of the Iskar, etc. The paintings in some of them, depicting hunting scenes and scenes of their everyday life, are dated from this period.

There were also settlements of pile-dwellings in the marshy areas along the Danube, in Varna and Beloslav Lakes as well as in the valley of the Struma.

During the Late Stone Age some crafts developed and this is well evidenced by the fragments of rudely modelled pottery, found out during excavation works. The Copper and Bronze Ages (the 3th and 2nd millennia BC) were marked by a revolutionary improvement in tools and weapons. Man already knew how to work metals and made better implements. Gold ornaments and idols were made as well as sceptres and necklaces for chieftains and priests. The development of metalworking in our lands at that time is evidenced by the archaeological finds at the village of Pobit Kamak (Razgrad). Axe, hammer and sword moulds, cult axes and spearheads were discovered there, pointing to the fact that the differentiation of the community was already under way.

By far the most important discovery of artifacts of those times is that of a Chalcolithic (Copper Age) necropolis on the outskirts of Varna in 1972. It bolstered Bulgaria's claims to be one of the cradles of European culture. Dating from the 4th millennium B C, the necropolis was unusual in that it contained many graves in which effigies, rather than human dead were buried, probably to ensure the continuing

health of the living. The gold trinkets with which these symbolic corpses were adorned - bracelets and pendants in the shape of animals display an incredible degree of skill considering that they were made as long as 6 000 years ago - probably the oldest examples of gold jewellery ever discovered. They have led many archaeologists to assume that metalworking techniques were developed in Bulgaria independently of the other places of civilization in the Near East.

It was at the end of the Late Bronze Age that the Greek authors, Homer in particular, called the territories north of Greece by the name of Thrace. The middle of the 2nd millennium B C is considered to be the end of the process of formation of the Pre-Thracian society in the lands of today's Bulgaria. Whether the Thracians were the direct descendants of the early settlers or latecomers is still a controversial point. The important thing is that the social and cultural development was complex - each new development arose on the basis of old achievements and combined various elements in itself.

At the end of the 1st millennium B C the Thracians already occupied most parts of the Balkán Peninsula. They were a large people divided into quite a number of tribes which often fought among themselves. The Thracians were farmers - they grew wheat, oats, hemp and bred horses, cows, sheep. They were good bee-keepers, vine-growers and wine-makers. The tribes in the mountains were excellent miners and supplied the craftsman with copper, gold, silver and iron.

In the 7th-6th centuries BC the Greeks started leaving their home towns looking for richer and less populated places to live. They were attracted by the beauty and fertility of Thrace and began to colonize the western coast of the Black Sea. The first colonists who established the city-states of Apollonia, Odessos, Ankhialos, etc., came from the Greek city-state of Miletus (on the Aegean coast of Turkey). In many cases the colonists settled on or near existing Thracian ports. This was the case with Mesembria where the natives were ejected by newcomers from the Greek mainland city of Megara. These colonies couldn't have survived without friendly contacts with the Thracians. A mutually beneficial system of trade developed. The Thracians obtained wine and salt in return for grain and livestock which the Greeks re-exported at a tidy profit. Intermarriage must have been common from

the earliest days and natives and colonists established a friendly relationship, observing each other's customs and paying homage to each other's gods. The contacts with the Greeks had important economic and political consequences for the Thracians, causing the disintegration of their tribal system. Until the 5th c. BC the Thracian tribes were detached and often at war with one another. And it was then that one of the tribes, the Odrysae, managed to unite some of them and established a state - the Odrysae kingdom whose first tzar was Theres. They got involved in the political struggles of the Balkan Peninsula and allied with Athens on several occasions. Under the rule of Theres's son Tzar Sitalkus the territory of the Thracian state was considerably enlarged. It became vast and powerful and its neighbours had to consider it. But after a certain period of prosperity the Odrysae kingdom fell into a decline. Philip II of Macedonia took advantage of this and his troops invaded Thrace in the 4th c. BC. Despite the brave resistance the Thracians put up, their lands were conquered by the Macedonians in 342 BC. However, the Macedonians could not hold Thrace for a long time. The state of the Odrysae was restored and became prosperous and powerful under the rule of Seut III (Tzar Sevum). He kept a big army and built inaccessible fortresses. He was the first Thracian tzar who minted coins with his image on them. The Panagyurishte gold treasure is believed to have belonged to him. After his death the Odrysae state was threatened by a new enemy coming from the north-east - the Celts. In the 3th c. BC they invaded the northern part of the Balkan peninsula and founded their kingdom which lasted for over 50 years.

In the second century BC the Romans made their first appearance in the Balkans and by the 1st c. BC they had already captured the whole of it. Many of the Thracians were killed and enslaved but most of them were romanized. To the south of the Balkan Range, where the invaders seldom penetrated, and especially high in the mountains the Thracian population continued to live undisturbed and managed to preserve their language and culture. The Vlachs are said to be the descendants of some of these tribes today.

In Roman times Bulgaria was divided into two provinces - Moesia (to the north of the Balkan Mountains) and Thrace (to the south

of the range). It was crossed by the main land route from the West to the Middle East. The Romans began building roads, bridges, new towns. Along the Danube they built forts for their garrisons. Upon the whole territory they established their style of living. In 330 AD the ancient Greek colony of Byzantium became the capital of the Empire. It was called Constantinople in honour of Emperor Constantine the Great who managed to strengthen the Empire and made Christianity its official religion. In 395 the Roman Empire was divided into two parts - the Western and Eastern Empires. Today's Bulgaria's lands remained in the Eastern Empire which became known as Byzantium. Like the Romans the Byzantines kept a strong army because they suffered numerous barbarian raids, too. The Goths, after them the Huns devastated the northern parts of Byzantium. Later it was exposed to new incursions. The Avars and the Slavs were the new arrivals. The Slavic invasion began in the 6th c. AD, a time when Byzantium was absorbed in a conflict with Persia and could not resist the incursions from the north. Ancient sources refer to two Slavic tribes north of the Danube at that time - the Slavenae and the Antae. Evidence suggests that the Slavenae, to the west, were the ancestors of the Serbs and Croatians, while the Antae moved into the regions of Bulgaria, Macedonia and Northern Greece. By the 7th c. AD the Slavs had invaded almost the whole of the Balkan Peninsula. Those Thracians, who had survived the Roman conquest and preserved their ethnic identity, were assimilated by the Slavs.

The Slavic tribes tilled the land, growing wheat, millet, hemp and flax. They bred cows, sheep and other domestic animals. They were good bee-keepers. They often had game and fish on their tables. The Slavs were excellent warriors, very good at hand-to-hand fighting. They made use of a lot of stratagems. The most widespread of the crafts was pottery-making. The Slavic tribes were organized in patriarchal communities. Like the Thracians they had a lot of deities. Perun was their supreme god - the almighty master and the creator of the lightning. But they also worshipped Svarog, the god of sun, Dazhbog, the god of fertility, Lada, the goddess of beauty, etc.

Meanwhile the Bulgars (Proto-Bulgarians), a nomadic tribe of Turkic origin, made their appearance at the Danube delta. The earliest

record of the Bulgars is to be found in the sources of the end of the 5th c. AD. Living at that time in the steppes to the north of the Black Sea, the Bulgar tribes were composed of skilled, warlike horsemen, governed by khans (chieftains) and boyars (nobles). In 635 Khan Kubrat managed to organize several tribes and establish a state which existed until his death in 642. After that the Bulgars were attacked by the Khazars and scattered in all directions. According to Byzantine sources, they split into five groups, each led by one of Kubrat's sons. Those led by Asparukh (Isperikh) moved into Bessarabia (between the Dniestr and Prut Rivers) where his people conquered or expelled the Slavic tribes living north of the Balkan Mountains. Later they allied with seven Slavic tribes against the Byzantines. The Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV led an army against them but was defeated. Thus, in 681 Byzantium recognized by treaty Bulgar control of the region between the Balkan Mountains and the Danube. This is considered to be the foundation of the Bulgarian state. The Bulgars gave their name to the state. Asparukh established his court at Pliska, northeast of modern Shoumen and a religious centre at Madara. At first the Slavs and the Bulgars lived in separate settlements, but gradually the Slavic majority assimilated the Bulgars both ethnically and linguistically.

## **24. The Thracians**

The boundaries of the Thracian ethnus comprise not only the territory of present-day Bulgaria but also that of today's Romania, Eastern Serbia, Northern Greece and Northwestern Turkey. The Thracians are the earliest people known to history who inhabited Bulgaria's land during the Bronze and the Iron Ages. By the end of the 1st millennium BC they had occupied most parts of the Balkan Peninsula and began to play an active part in its history. The earliest records of their social organization, culture and relations with the antique world date from the 8th and 7th centuries BC and can be found in Homer's Iliad and Odysey. Valuable information has reached us through the works of Herodotus, a Greek historian, who wrote in the 5th c. BC that the Thracians were the most numerous people in Europe and came second in the world after the Indians (obviously the world Herodotus knew). Regrettably, during their 2000-year-long history the Thracians did not create an alphabet of their own. The reconstruction of their past has been made possible by the scanty information available in the literary tradition of Hellenes and Romans and the results from the large-scale research work archaeologists have been carrying out for years.

The names of more than 20 tribes have been preserved by history. Today's Bulgaria's land was inhabited by the Odrysae, Astae, Bessae (southern Bulgaria), Moesae, Getae (northern Bulgaria), Serdae (southwestern Bulgaria) and others. They were often at war among themselves but spoke the same language, shared the same beliefs and had common customs and traditions.

During the early centuries of their development the Thracians were engaged in farming. They tilled the land producing wheat, oats, flax, hemp. The tribes, living in the south, were good vine-growers and wine-makers. Bee-keeping was spread north of the Balkan Mountains.

In fact, the Greeks considered those regions to be dangerous because there were so many bees there. Nevertheless, the Thracians were experienced bee-keepers and produced honey and beeswax in large quantities.

As time went by the tribes divided into land-tillers and cattle-breeders. The lush pastures fed their large herds of cattle. Each family kept sheep, goats, hens, cows. But what they really took pride in were their swift, thoroughbred horses.

The tribes, living in the mountains, could extract copper, iron, silver and gold from their womb. They also knew how to obtain timber and resin - two very valuable commodities in antiquity.

Obviously, the basis of the Thracian economy was the production of foodstuffs, raw materials and other goods which fully satisfied their needs, leaving considerable quantities for export. Their export in the southeastern and southern directions is particularly easy to trace - their trade routes led to the peoples inhabiting Asia Minor, the Middle East and the Aegean region. The exchange of merchandise was chiefly carried out by sea through the ports of Thrace, Egypt, Caria, Crete and Mycenae. This inevitably led to exchanging ideas, information and people, too, and precipitated the social and political development of Thrace and its people. Quite early - as far back as the second half of the 2nd millennium BC the first class and social formations already existed in Thrace, i.e. the social differentiation was a fact. The process comprised all Thracian tribes. Their social structure was simple - the ruler, who was also the supreme priest, was at the top of the social pyramid. He was aided in exercising his power by the aristocrats who ranked higher than the free community farmers and artisans. The so called patriarchal slavery existed in the Thracian society - children could be sold into slavery by their fathers. And it happened when the farmers failed to pay the aristocrats the taxes for cultivating their land. But, on the whole, slavery was not widespread in Thrace and the above mentioned structure of the Thracian society remained unchanged up to the Roman conquest in the 1st c. BC, i.e. for more than fifteen hundred years.

At the beginning of the 13th c. BC some Thracian state formations appeared comprising tribes living in southern Thrace. They were

allies of the Trojans in the Trojan war, with whom they had economic, political and perhaps, ethnic relations. One of the Thracian rulers in this region, described by Homer in his Iliad, was Tzar Rhesus - famous for his influence, treasures and tragic fate. He was killed by Ulysses in his camp before joining the battles near Troy. His description by Homer is worth reading because it gives an idea how impressive the Thracian noblemen must have looked on the battlefield - shining in their armour of pure gold from head to toe. The common warriors were called "peltasi" because their shields were covered with pelt - "pelte" was the Thracian word for it. They wore hitons which were the traditional dress for both men and women in Thrace. In winter they wore hooded capes, deerskin boots and fox fur caps. They had spears and short swords and were foot soldiers. But the aristocrats took part in the battles in their chariots, drawn by swift horses.

Despite the above mentioned state formations, the political detachment of the Thracian tribes was preserved until the beginning of the 5th c. BC. It was then that Theres, the chieftain of the Odrysae, made a successful attempt at organizing a number of tribes into a unified Thracian state. Under his successors Sparadokus, Sitalkus and Sevtum (5th c. BC), all Thracian tribes in today's Bulgaria's land were united in the Odrysae kingdom. New Thracian states enjoying brilliant, though transient, political success, those of the Bessae, Astae, Getae and the Dacean tribes appeared between the end of the 4th and the beginning of the 1st centuries B C. The endless scuffles for political domination among the Thracian family dynasties facilitated the invasion of Rome which succeeded in imposing its power in the year 46 B C. The Thracians put up a strong nearly two-century-long resistance but were eventually expelled or absorbed by the Romans and later by the Slavs. But traces of their customs, traditions, beliefs and culture have been preserved until today.

All written evidence, discovered artifacts and architectural monuments bolster the idea of the Thracian people being one of the pillars of the ancient European civilization and Bulgaria - its cradle. The Thracian heritage is amazing both in execution and the view of life it represents. Admiring the exquisite make of the objects from the treasures discovered in our land or the wall paintings in the Tomb at

Kazanlak, one can't help feeling a desire to understand the mentality of their creators - the Thracians.

Like the other antique people the Thracians had a lot of deities. The cult of the Thracian horseman, the god of nature, animals and plants was the most widespread. All Bulgarian historical museums display a collection of votive tablets, portraying the Thracian horseman (also translated as the Thracian rider or the Thracian hero). The Thracians had a thing about horses from the earliest times and the neighbouring Greeks were envious of their stockbreeding skill and excellent horsemanship. The cult of Horse and Rider was common to the lands bordering the Black Sea. The horse was an animal (possibly because of its swiftness) regarded as capable of reaching the underworld and communicating with the dead, while the rider was a protector of nature and the souls of the departed. The tablets with reliefs of the Thracian horseman, accompanied by a hunting dog, began appearing in Thrace in the 3rd c. BC and soon became universal throughout the eastern Balkans. They were placed in sanctuaries and sacred caves, linked with deities, associated with health or the protection of nature. The Thracian horseman found its way into the subsequent Christian art of the Balkans with the familiar mounted hero re-emerging in medieval icons of Saint Demetrius and Saint George.

The most ancient belief of the Thracians was in Bendida - the Great Mother Goddess of nature and fertility. They worshipped the sun and the Thracian horseman was the son of Bendida and the sun. Part of the religious practices of the Thracians, associated with the cult of the sun was to keep the holy fire burning all the time in the sacrificial hearths and to dance barefoot on glowing embers. Women did the dancing, begging of the sun fertility. These ritual dances have survived in some villages in southeastern Bulgaria called "nestinarski igri".

The Thracians believed in life after death. They thought the world beyond was a much better place to live. Their religious rites included sacrificing both people and animals. What is more, those chosen to be sacrificed, felt honoured. Apart from the common gods, each tribe had its own ones. In fact, the Thracians had so many deities that their names could hardly be listed. They worshipped rocks, caves and springs as their living places and often had ritual feasts in their honour.

the longest of the ceremonies were in honour of Dionysus - the god of vine-growing and wine-making. The Greeks adopted this god as well as many others that got new names in the Greek Mythology and through it acquired worldwide fame. But only a few people know about their Thracian origin. The Dionysian celebrations often grew wild and could be dangerous. Orpheus - the legendary musician of Thrace is said to have been torn apart by "the women of Thrace" - followers of Dionysus having an orgy. The Dionysian rites have reached us too. They can be traced in the ritual associated with Saint Tryfon the Pruner (Zarezan) - the patron of the vine-growers and wine-makers, the Christian successor to Dionysus.

The mummer tradition, part of the Dionysian rites too, can be discovered in the "Kukeri" dance, performed on "Kukerovden" - a widespread festival in Bulgaria associated with the start of the agricultural year.

To the Thracians wine was a holy drink. Unlike the Greeks, they did not water it down and drank it straight. The cup-bearer was a very important person in their society and took a central position during the feasts they often had. In fact, very often, it was the ruler himself who poured the wine, thus stressing his high social ranking. One of the most beautiful legends passed down to us by the Thracians is that of Orpheus who has already been mentioned. Orpheus was supposedly born of a Muse (perhaps Calliope, patron of epic poetry) and King Oegrus of the Odrysae tribe (Apollo in another version of the story). His mastery of the lyre moved animals and trees to dance, and with his songs he tried to regain his wife who had died. His music charmed Charon, the ferryman, and Cerberus, the guardian of the River Styx, and finally Hades himself, who agreed to return Eurydice on the condition that neither of them would look back as they departed. But when they appeared in the sunlight of the overworld, Orpheus turned to smile at Eurydice and lost her forever. After that Orpheus roamed the Rhodopes singing mournfully until he met his death as has already been described. His head continued singing as it floated down the River Mesta to Lesbos, where it began to prophesy until its fame eclipsed that of the Oracle at Delphi.

The Thracians' outlook on life, their beliefs and traditions, their skills and mastery have been preserved in what they have left.

Bulgaria is dotted with a great number of burial mounds, built in pairs beside the roads. They were erected by a society which obviously thought it important to honour the prominent dead and which may have practised a form of ancestor-worship which involved the deification of tribal chieftains and kings. According to Herodotus, deceased Thracian nobles were laid out for three days before a funeral feast of "various sacrificial animals" which followed a short period of mourning and wailing. After the corpse was buried or cremated a "tumulus of soil" was raised and various competitive games were organized "the biggest prize being awarded for wrestling". The Thracians were polygamous and the wives of a dead warrior would compete for the honour of being buried with him which supports the idea that these people had little fear of death. They believed in the existence of a soul which, separate from the body, was capable of enjoying an afterlife. Certain tribes mourned the birth of children and celebrated the death of their elders - as if the latter event represented release from the misery of the material world.

Being such strong believers in afterlife, the Thracians provided their dead with all objects they might possibly need in the world beyond. The tombs, especially those of the illustrious dead, were covered with paintings on the inside, depicting the dead man's exploits. Gold vessels full of food, textiles, weapons, the chariot and the best horses - all this accompanied its owner on his journey to the unknown as well as his favourite wife. All crafts related to the funerary rites prospered in ancient Thrace. The artisans achieved the perfection we admire today when looking at the frescoes in the Tomb at Kazanlak or at the vessels of the treasures, discovered in our lands. Unfortunately, most of the tombs were robbed of all valuable objects in ancient times. By breaking through the robbers destroyed part of the walls of the stone sepulchral chambers which resulted in the subsequent destruction of the paintings by their exposure to rain and damp.

The earliest tombs of the Thracians were made in rock massifs. As it was said earlier, they had a lot of deities and worshipped them in caves, near springs or some majestic rock massif. Those were their sanctuaries. Sometimes they used their sanctuaries as necropolises as well. Such is the case with the Gluhite Kamani (The Deaf Stones) near

Lyubimets (Ivailovgrad). Two rock tombs were cut into the rocks as well as many niches for the ashes of the dead. The rock tombs preceded the building of the dolmens in Sakar Planina and in the Eastern Rhodopes (early 1st millennium BC). The dolmens - dolmeni - are among the oldest monumental Thracian tombs. They have a sepulchral chamber with or without an antechamber, built of several big roughly hewn stone slabs, covered with a mound of earth.

Sepulchral structures of various design and execution, covered with burial mounds, have remained from the Thracian architecture of the 5th-4th centuries BC. The domed tombs are the most important of them. They are symmetric in their planning, with a different number of rooms. Some consist of one chamber only, whereas others have a covered corridor (dromos) with one or two antechambers in front of the main one. The most remarkable example of the stone domed tombs of this period is the one near the village of Mezek (Haskovo). During the Hellenic period the Thracian sepulchral architecture was enriched by new forms and building materials. Along with the circular chambers which had been built by that time, they began to build square and rectangular ones. The tombs with rectangular chambers are known as tombs of the "Macedonian" type. The tombs near Plovdiv, Maglizh, Kazanlak (built of fired bricks already) and especially the domed tombs of Seutopolis are of great interest. The use of fired bricks in Thrace at the end of the 4th c. BC marks an advanced stage of development and was the earliest use of this building material in Europe.

When speaking of the Thracian heritage mention should be made of the treasures discovered in our lands. The Thracian tzars possessed a lot of gold. To them it was a symbol of supreme power and evidence of their divine origin. They had a special rite of burying their treasures in the new territories they had conquered. They did not hide their gold in this way. It was an expression of their desire to keep the land for ever. Some other treasures that have been found out are amazingly rich. The one discovered at the village of Rogozen consists of 165 silver and gold-plated objects. Others are smaller but of exceptionally exquisite make. The gold wreath of the Vratsa treasure is so fine that its tiny leaves must have shaken at every movement of the Thracian princess to whom it belonged. The famous Panagyurishte

treasure was discovered in 1949 when two brothers began to dig clay for bricks. Quite unexpectedly, they uncovered 9 vessels of solid gold (6 kg), striking with their beauty and fantastic forms. The ancient masters knew how to forge, found and solder precious metals. But there is much more than that. All these vessels, weapons, jewellery are the materialized imaginative power of an artistic people endowed with a lively intellect and a subtle sense of beauty, and undisputable evidence of an advanced culture that flourished in our lands centuries ago. The world oldest wrought gold was found out near Varna in 1972. About 3000 years after it the famous gold mask of the Egyptian pharaoh Tutankamon was made.

## 25. The Kazanlak Tomb

With its mural paintings the tomb at Kazanlak is a unique monument of the Thracian painting in the Hellenic period. Although robbed of its valuable objects, it had miraculously preserved the paintings almost intact. The tomb was discovered in 1944 in an area called Tulbeto in the northeastern part of Kazanlak. The mound was removed and a protective structure was built around the tomb later. In order to avoid damage to the precious murals the tomb was closed and an exact replica, open to the public, was built next to it.

In terms of design the Thracian tomb at Kazanlak is a beehive domed tomb, typical of the burial Thracian architecture of the period 3rd-5th c. BC. It dates from the 4th-3rd c. BC when the Odrysae kingdom with its capital Seutopolis (an ancient Thracian town lying at the bottom of the dam of Koprinka today) enjoyed a great political, economic and cultural uplift. The tomb is of modest size. It consists of an anteroom, corridor (dromos) and a small circular burial chamber which is covered with a bell-like dome. The entrance to it is a rectangular opening, stone-framed and with traces of a metal door once attached to it. The vault of the dromos is of triangular shape. The tomb was built of fired bricks joined with mortar, very much like the tombs, discovered in the necropolis of Seutopolis. The use of fired bricks two centuries before Rome testifies to the advanced level of building technology in the Odrysae state.

The dromos and the chamber of the tomb were vaulted by overlapping the rows of bricks. The lower edges of the bricks were cut slant-wise. On the outside the brick walls were faced with stone and clay mortar.

The paintings are among the best preserved ancient frescoes of the Early Hellenistic period and therefore unique in the world history of art. Four basic colours were used: black, red, yellow and white. The

techniques employed are two: fresco for the ornaments and scenes and tempera for the painting of the floor and the walls. About 40 sq. m of mural paintings cover the walls of the dromos and the chamber. The scheme of decoration is based on the principle of the Structural style of the Hellenistic decorative painting - with a three-sectioned plinth, painted on the lower part of the walls. In the dromos the plinth consists of black rectangles (orthostatae) and in the chamber they are white. The wall surface over the plinth was painted in Pompeian red, crowned with two friezes - one of leave ornaments and the other one with scenes. The second frieze shows a battle between the infantry and the cavalry of two hostile armies. The frescoes are obviously connected with the warlike exploits of the Thracian nobleman buried in the tomb. On the western wall of the corridor a one-to-one battle was depicted.

Inside the domed chamber the same pattern was observed only the plinth here consists of white rectangles, followed by a wall in Pompeian red above which Ionic architectural elements were reproduced in colour: a triple architrave, decorated with ox-skulls and rosettes. Then follows the main frieze which displays a composition of figures. Above it there is a band of egg-shaped, dented and cordlike ornaments ending in a cornice of lionhead-shaped gargoyles. In the centre of the main frieze, opposite the entrance the figures of a man and a woman, sitting at a small table, covered with fruit, were painted. These are the Thracian nobleman and his wife. Their servants are around them, bearing gifts - a cupbearer, two musicians, servants, leading horses, two female servants on the right of the noble Thracian's wife carrying a box of jewellery and a piece of veil. This is a funeral feast with a procession exquisitely and realistically painted. The touchingly clasped hands of the married couple suggest the idea of bidding farewell and parting with the dead husband. The noble couple are crowned with laurel wreaths - a popular symbol of heroization in the Hellenic world. The uppermost part of the dome shows three chariots racing at headlong speed.

The realistic frescoes in the tomb are the work of an excellent Thracian artist of the Early Hellenistic period. His skill in depicting the Thracian spirit and lifestyle indicate indisputably the richness of the

Thracian culture. The Thracian tomb at Kazanlak is one of the monuments in Bulgaria included in UNESCO's List of the World Heritage.

## **26. The Roman Heritage**

The expansion of Rome towards the Balkan Peninsula began as early as the end of the 3th century BC. For almost three centuries it met the stubborn resistance of the local population until it finally conquered the peninsula in the 1st century BC. Two Roman provinces were established in the Thracian lands to the south of the Danube - Moesia and Thrace. They were at different stages of socio-economic and cultural development. The towns along the Black Sea coast were flourishing Hellenic centres and the influence of the Hellenistic culture had already penetrated inland south of the Balkan range, while the tribes that inhabited the northern province of Moesia were much more backward. This resulted in the different degree of romanization and affected the appearance of the towns built later.

Establishing their rule, the Romans strengthened the Low Danubian banks in order to protect the newly formed provinces from the incursions of Dacians, who inhabited the regions to the north of the Danube. So a lot of military forts were built along the river and to the south near the Balkan Range.

At first the inclusion of Moesia and Thrace in the boundaries of the Roman Empire did not affect the economic and political life of their population. The first important reforms, which gave an impetus to their development, were made by Emperor Trajan (98-117 BC.) after his victory over the Dacians. A period of peace for the inhabitants of the lands to the south of the Danube followed which resulted in the urbanization of Thrace and Moesia and the construction of an extensive road network, encouraging their cultural and economic development. Four towns were established in Moesia: Ratiaria (near the village of Archar) and Oescus (near the village of Gigen) as colonies and Nicopolis ad Istrum (near the village of Nikyup) and Marcianopolis (near the village of Devnya) as polities. The foundation of the towns

of Augusta Trayana (Stara Zagora), Serdica (Sofia), Nicopolis ad Nestum (Gotse Delchev) as well as the further development of the existing towns along the Black Sea coast were connected with the urbanizing activity of Emperor Trajan in Thrace.

The whole 2nd century and the first decades of the 3rd century were marked by intensive building in the towns which gave them their final architectural appearance. Their prosperity was great and reached its peak towards the middle of the 3rd c. and immediately after that the Gothic invasions followed. The permanent raids of the barbarian tribes in Moesia and Thrace as well as the serious crisis which the Roman slave system suffered, led to the decline of the towns in the two provinces.

Some of them were thoroughly demolished during the Gothic invasions in 251 A.D. and could never regain their former prosperity and splendour.

The rule of Constantine the Great was marked by a temporary stabilization and renewed flourishing of the territories in the eastern part of the Balkan Peninsula. By moving the political centre of the empire from Rome to Constantinople, he made these territories very important as they were now near the capital. This influenced their development and the declining towns in them prospered again. Their architectural profile was enriched with new public buildings. With their architectural and decorative features many of these buildings (or, at least their remains) are part of the heritage of Bulgaria. This period, however, was of short duration. Even the division of the empire, torn by internal crises and shaken by barbarian invasions, did not improve the conditions in the peninsula. Gradually, the enormous Slavic masses, coming from the north, invaded these lands and opened a new page in their history.

The remains of the towns from the Roman period show their advanced development. In their planning they have certain characteristic features in common: adaptation of the overall plan to the peculiarities of the site; a network of streets mutually perpendicular and oriented to the four cardinal points; the width and the architectural forming of the streets reflect their significance in the whole town-planning concept; sewerage and water-supply, etc.

An important feature of the town-building was the fortification of the towns. They were fortified in the early Roman period and during the next centuries new walls were permanently built and supplied with fighting equipment.

The civic and ecclesiastical architecture of the Roman period is represented by the remains of a considerable number of buildings throughout Bulgaria's territory. Our information of the architecture of the urban dwelling of that time is supported by important finds such as the Roman villa near Madara, the villa in the suburbs of former Serdica and the richly decorated villa near Montana.

The sepulchral architecture of this period has a rather simple plan. With the exception of the tomb near Pomorie, all the other structures of the kind have one sepulchral chamber only. The vault covering is new in this type of construction. The interiors were richly decorated. The establishment of Christianity as official religion led to the early Christian church building. The first churches were built and their appearance reflected the fundamental changes that marked the end of Antiquity and the dawn of the Middle Ages.

Serdica - was an important ancient town in today's Bulgaria's lands. Remains of it have been found out under the central part of Sofia. It was built by Emperor Trajan on the site of an existing Thracian settlement, but enjoyed its greatest prosperity in the 4th c. AD under the rule of Emperor Constantine the Great. Under the Romans the biggest and the most impressive town of the Serdae became more urbanized with its orthogonal street network, rectangular quarters (insulae) and a centre with important public buildings. The streets were of different width and unpaved. The insulae were of various size and densely built up. Serdica's prosperity in the 4th c. was marked by great building activity. During that period the most important civic buildings were erected and many of the existing ones were enlarged or modernized. In the centre around the forum two of the most important buildings stood: the Buleuterium (the Town Hall) and the Martyrium, which was later transformed into a church known to us today as St. George's (Sveti Georgi) Church.

The remains characterize Serdica as an important centre of provincial art and architecture.

One of the biggest towns in the Roman province of Thrace was Augusta Trayana founded, as the name suggests, by Emperor Trajan. Its remains lie under the present-day town of Stara Zagora. The ancient town had an irregular plan. It was surrounded by two walls of which the inner one is the older. The earliest building period dates from the 2nd c. AD. The unearthed remains do not provide enough information about the architecture of the town and the centre and important public buildings like the Augusteum, the theatre, etc. have not been located. But the rich archaeological finds speak of their existence and suggest that they were of imposing dimensions and provided with rich decoration. The town's prosperity was shaken by the Gothic invasion in the middle of the 3rd c. The age of Constantine the Great brought a second period of prosperity during which the existing buildings were renewed and reconstructed.

Oeskus was situated on a low plateau near the Iskar River close to the contemporary village of Gigen. With its situation of great economic and strategic importance Oeskus was one of the leading towns of Moesia. Its majestic remains provide evidence of the onetime splendour of the town. It began as a legionary camp in the 1st c. AD and was declared a colony by Emperor Trajan after his victory over the Dacians. In the 2nd c. it was fortified. That was the period of its planning, urbanization and greatest building activity. The town had a characteristic Roman layout - with straight, mutually perpendicular streets, oriented to the four cardinal points. The town had sewerage and a main water supply. The most important remains discovered so far in Oeskus are these of the Corinthian Temple of Fortuna which marks one of the highest achievements of Roman architecture. Another big public building to the south of the temple is remarkable for the richness of its interior and especially for the mosaic depicting a scene of Menander's comedy Achaeans. The town prospered under the rule of Constantine the Great. Towards the end of the 3rd c. and the beginning of the 4th c. the town was fortified again because of the raids of the Barbarian tribes which finally led to its decline. In the 6th c., like many other towns to the north of Haemus, Oescus was completely destroyed.

Abritus, 2 km to the east of Razgrad, is known as the site of a fierce battle between the Goths and the Romans in 251 AD. It was

founded as a military camp in the 2nd c. It was fortified in the 4th c. Outside the fortified town, which was inhabited by privileged citizens only, lay the unprotected town quarters. The streets were paved with gravel and of different width depending on their importance. Few of the buildings have been investigated so far. The most important of them is a peristyle structure noted for its stately architecture. After the invasions of the Goths the town prospered again during the reign of Constantine the Great. It was fortified again in the 6th century (at the time of Justinian the Great). However, this could not save it from the Avars who destroyed it at the end of the 6th century AD.

The ancient town near Hissar developed from a Thracian settlement built around the hot mineral springs there. There is enough evidence of its development during the Roman period as an important medicinal centre and residential area. There are two hypotheses concerning the name of the town. According to the first one it was named Augusta while the second one ascribes the ruins to the ancient town of Diocletianopolis.

The town was fortified in the 2nd c. Square towers protruded from the walls on all four sides of the fortress. The streets had gravel pavement and stone kerbs. Of the many baths that were built round the mineral springs two, dating from the 4th c, have been located. The necropolis of the ancient town is a valuable source of information. The town prospered in the 4th-6th centuries when its fame as a medicinal centre grew and it started to spread outside its walls. Some of the early Christian basilicas, built outside the fortress, belong to this period.

A unique monument of Roman architecture in Bulgaria's lands are the Thermae in Varna. And they are the only survival of Roman architecture in the ancient town of Odessos as well as the largest antique building ever discovered in Bulgaria. The Thermae are in the south-eastern part of Varna. The walls, comparatively well preserved, are of an imposing building which must have occupied an area of 7000 sq. m. They were built in the 2nd c. AD and were used until the end of the 3rd c. The building comprised two sections - one for men and one for women. The entrances to the sections were symmetrically placed at the two ends of its northern front. Remains of the vestibules, the central large hall (palestra), the dressing-rooms (apoditeria), the cold

rooms (frigidaria) and the hot rooms (tepidaria and caldaria) have been preserved. The sewers are symmetrical and consist of vaulted basement canals. The structure was built of mixed masonry. The walls are broken up by pilasters and niches. Numerous marble fragments testify to the rich architectural finish both of the exterior and the interior of the building.

The Late Classical Tomb near Silistra with its mural paintings occupies an important place among the historical art treasures of Bulgaria. It belongs to the remains of the ancient town of Durostorum near the modern town of Silistra. It is an example of the simple design and execution characteristic of this type of structure in the Roman period. It consists of a single room - a rectangular, vaulted sepulchral chamber of comparatively modest dimensions. The remarkable thing about it is its interior decoration. The walls and the vaults are completely covered with mural paintings. Opposite the entrance a married couple - the owners of the tomb - are depicted. There are figures of male and female servants on the southern and northern walls. They are offering their masters various things. Plant and animal motifs and four hunting scenes are on the vault. The decoration of the tomb bears a resemblance to the older traditions of the Classical painting.

About 3 km northwest of the village of Nikyup (Tarnovo) the ruins of a once rich and prosperous Roman town called Nicopolis ad Istrum lie on a low plateau to the south of which the Rositsa River flows. It was founded in 102 AD by Emperor Trajan to commemorate, as the name Nicopolis suggests, his victory over the Dacians. This was the Nicopolis near the Danube - ad Isrum and there was another one near the Mesta River whose name was Nicopolis ad Nestum. The site chosen for the town was very strategic, an important prerequisite in those times of frequent barbarian incursions, and this speeded up its development. Within a short time it became a well-arranged town with all amenities and splendid buildings. It reached its greatest prosperity around the end of the 2nd and the beginning of the 3rd centuries AD when its most noteworthy public buildings were erected. About the middle of the 3rd c. the town was fortified. As the remains convincingly show it was a centre of economic and cultural prosperity in Antiquity.

Like most Roman towns of the period with the rigid regularity of its planning Nicopolis reminded a military camp. Basically, the layout of Roman towns consisted of two absolutely straight main streets at right angles - cardo maximus and decumanus maximus and a number of streets parallel to them - cardines and decumani. The streets were oriented to the four cardinal points. Where the main streets crossed was the town centre with the forum, the temples, the theaters, etc. Along the streets rows of columns rose which carried huge arches. In Nicopolis ad Istrum the street network was laid out according to the regular Roman system of cardines and decumani. The area, confined by the walls, is an irregular quadrangle. The gates of the fortress were placed at the end of the town's two main streets - cardo maximus and decumanus maximus. The semi-circular fortress towers jutted out of the wall. To the southeast of the fortified town a smaller adjacent and similarly fortified area - "castel" lies. The streets were paved with flagstones bounded by kerbs. Under the pavement the brick-built canals of the town's sewerage system were laid. The streets formed rectangular areas - insulae - of different sizes. The largest of them were situated along the decumanus maximus. The remains show that they were of a square or slightly elongated rectangular shape.

The forum, an essential element of Roman town-planning, was next to the intersection of the two main streets. That was the town's central area containing all civic buildings well as theatres and temples. Nicopolis's forum is in the form of a rectangle, measuring 75x54.40 m, its long axis lying east to the west. To the east it is limited by cardo maximus and to the south by decumanus maximus. Raised above the street level, it was kept free of traffic. It was decorated on all four sides with porticos in Ionic order. The most important public buildings have been discovered in its western part. The northern one was the Town Hall-buleuterium, and the southern one was the odeum - a building for musical performances among the ancient Greeks and Romans. Between them a small peristyle courtyard was formed (a courtyard surrounded by a row of columns). It was accessible to the east through the peristyle of the forum. To the west, decumanus maximus led to it through a portico with four columns in Corinthian order. According to the inscription on the portico it was built in 145 AD. Numerous archi-

tectural fragments and images on coins minted in Nicopolis evidence the one-time richness of its architecture and decoration. The façades must have been exuberantly decorated with friezes, pediments, statues, fragments of which can be seen among the ruins. In style, from, artistic skill and materials used they reflect the characteristic features of the Roman architecture of the Middle Empire (2nd-3rd centuries AD)

From the second half of the 3rd century on Nicopolis began to lose its significance and shared the fate of the other towns in Moesia. From the 7th c. on no further reference to it can be found. Nothing but ruins suggesting its former splendour have survived until today.

## 27. Varna

Varna, the biggest city along the Bulgarian Black Sea coast and the third largest city in Bulgaria, is a wonderful combination between a modern resort and a big industrial centre, a city which has a long and eventful history.

This area has been inhabited for over 7 000 years. It was the cradle of several civilizations. It is proved that there was a settlement of Prehistoric men near the village of Beloslav. Twenty centuries ago members of an unknown tribe lived in the caves of present-day Aladzha Monastery. About the 12th century BC a Thracian tribe erected their dwellings on oak piles in the lake near Varna, and still nowadays we can see the burial mounds where they placed their nobles and priests. Highly skilled gold- and coppersmiths lived around the Gulf of Varna 6 000 years ago, and luckily their magnificent works have come down to us.

Varna's importance as a port dates from 585 BC, when the Greek colonizers, Apollonians and Milesians, forced the Thracians out and established the Greek colony of Odessos, meaning "town on water". Soon it became a flourishing and independent city with high walls to protect it, the ruins of which were found deep below the present town. The town's best years came in the 2nd and 3rd centuries, when it was the Roman province of Moesia's main outlet to the sea. It developed a brisk trade with the Thracians and the Aegean ports, and was a bustling place where Greek and Thracian cultures met and mingled. The Romans fortified the city, built a water-supply system and many temples and public buildings. The remains of some of them can still be seen today (the Roman Thermae).

In the 4th century AD the Roman Empire disintegrated and the town became an important port of the Easter Roman Empire, later known as Byzantium. Some remains of churches of that period show

that Varna was one of the first parts of the empire to be converted to Christianity.

The city was destroyed several times: by the Huns in the 4th century, and by the Avars in 586 AD, but later restored by Emperor Justinian in the 6th century. During his reign, the town flourished both economically and culturally.

Meanwhile, Slav tribes invaded and settled in the land. They repopulated the town and called it by its present name. It is thought that they first called the Provadiiska River “Vrana”, meaning “black one”, and then transferred the name to the town. It was first mentioned when Asparoukh’s horsemen came from the north to found the First Bulgarian State in 681, but the town became Bulgarian in the 8th century. After the baptism of the Bulgarians in 864 it turned into a great Christian centre, and the ruins of that period, now discovered, recall the architecture of the old capital Preslav. The town changed hands several times but it went on flourishing. In the period of the First Bulgarian Kingdom it was the region’s biggest port and an important staging-post for the Byzantine fleet on its way to the Danube. It was in 1201 that Tzar Kaloyan recaptured Varna, and thanks to a long period of peace, the town became a lively centre of commerce and maintained trade relations with Constantinople, Venice and Genoa. It achieved the fame of a big administrative and cultural centre as well.

However, in the 14th century, the state showed signs of decline. In 1352 the Turks invaded Christian Europe, but the four parts, in which Bulgaria was divided, did not unite their forces against the enemy. Varna’s local boyar proclaimed himself independent and separated from the rest of Bulgarian lands. Finally, in 1393, Varna was captured by the Turks. For nearly 5 centuries, Ottoman domination turned Varna into an Oriental city. In 1444 a crusade for the liberation of the Christians in the Balkan Peninsula, led by Ladislaus III, King of Poland and Magyar, aroused people’s hopes. But when the crusaders reached the outskirts of the town, their leader fell there in the battle against the oppressors. The king was given the name of Ladislaus of Varna, and the battlefield has been turned into a park.

Declining somewhat under the Turks, Varna recovered as an important trading centre in the 19th century, when the population of

Bulgarians, Greeks, Turks and Gagaus (Turkish-speaking Christians) made it one of the coast's more cosmopolitan centres. To the Turks Varna was the key to the security of the western Black Sea, and the town's position and military role is still reflected in the students of Varna's Naval Academy.

Later it became the principal route of passenger and freight traffic from Western Europe to Asia, and after the construction of the first railway in the Ottoman Empire, Rousse-Varna in 1867, the economic importance of the city increased.

Varna was seized by the Russian navy during the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-29 and held for two years, but then it fell to the Turks again. During the Crimean war Varna was a cholera-ravaged Ottoman garrison. The headquarters of the countries allied with Turkey were established here. Lord Raglan, the British commander-in-chief, resided here for some time. Major General J. R. Hume described the town as "no paradise... a wretched place with very few shops".

After the Russo-Turkish war of 1877-78, on July 27, 1878, Varna was liberated, and it grew rapidly. In the course of years after the Liberation, the port was built up, a brewery, a tobacco and a soap factory, together with a cotton spinning and textile mill, but Varna remained a town that was oriental in spirit.

Today the town has taken its place among the biggest industrial centres of our country. The port is already too small to receive our own and foreign ships, that's why the rapid construction of a port has been put in hand at the Varna Lake, connected with the Black Sea by a canal. The enlargement of the port made necessary the construction of the huge Asparoukh Bridge for road traffic. The biggest shipyards in the country build and repair all kinds of ships for many countries, including Britain. There are many important enterprises that produce diesel engines under licence from the British firm "Perkins", electrical appliances, manometers, canned foods, ready-made clothes, soft drinks. Many local crafts industries and craft cooperatives complete the industrial aspect of the city.

Devnya is another large industrial area near Varna. Formerly a small village, known only for its mills. today it is known as the Valley of Heavy Industry. Its plants produce calcinated soda, cement, fertilizers, sugar, glassware, etc.

Varna is the centre of a rich agricultural region. There is a vast area of orchards, market gardens and hot houses. A large belt of vineyards has been planted along the edge of the sea to take on the vine-growing tradition of the region that gives some of the famous Bulgarian wines.

Over the past few years Varna has struggled more than most to renew its appearance. The signs of change are everywhere - fashion boutiques, West European and Japanese car showrooms, video-rental stores, fast-food establishments, etc.

Varna is a city of old cultural traditions. It has two theatres and a puppet theatre, an Opera House and a philharmonic orchestra, a very rich library, and many cinemas. Its great musical and cultural traditions have made Varna the venue of the International Ballet Competition, the Varna Summer International Festival, the International Festival of Red Cross Films, the World Congresses of Sociologists and Architects, the Puppet Theatre festival, etc. Its Art Gallery possesses a fine collection of works by eminent artists.

Being a university city, Varna has several institutions of higher education: a Naval Academy, an Institute of Economic Studies, a Technical University, a Medical School, a College of International Tourism, Varna Free University, and many high schools, as well as research institutes for water transport, ship drawing, oceanology and water resources.

The name of Varna is, above all, linked with its resort complexes. Because of its natural beauty it was used as a resort still in the 18th century. Many travellers along the coast described its beaches and monasteries and how they were used for holiday-making. The town turned into an international resort after the Second World War, when new hotels, rest homes, roads and other facilities began to be built. In or around Varna, in St. Konstantin, Golden Sands, Albena or along the Kamchia River, you can enjoy the clean sea, fresh air and fine sand.

### *Sights*

On entering Varna, do not miss the Cathedral of the Assumption of the Virgin, the second largest in Bulgaria after Alexander Nevski in Sofia. The idea to build the cathedral was suggested by Simeon of

Preslav. A year after the Liberation, on November 9, 1879, a nine-member commission was elected to raise the funds. The first contribution of 1 000 leva was made by prince Alexander of Battenberg, who turned the first sod. The Cathedral was designed by the Odessa architect Maas, so it is still argued whether the design was suggested by a church near St. Petersburg or by the famous Odessa church. The foundation stone was laid on August 22, 1880, and the construction began. Then Gencho Kunev of Tryavna, an eminent Revival-period master-builder, was the only one who agreed to work on a foreign design. The built-up area is 24 by 24 m. The Construction was completed in August 1886, but the consecration took place on October 26, 1910.

The roof was made from copper sheets brought from England, but they became weather-eaten. The first belfry was lower, so in 1940-41 it was rebuilt to make it 38 m. high.

The church has three altars: the central altar is dedicated to the Assumption, the southern - to St. Nicholas of Myra in Lycia, and the northern - to Alexander Nevski. Masters of Debur carved the bishop's throne and the iconostasis which was placed in 1912. The murals were executed in 1949-50 by a team under the guidance of the Russian artist Professor Nikolai Rostovtsev. Today an excellent male-voice choir sings at the Sunday mass or on religious feasts.

The Archaeological Museum or the Museum of History and Art, the first of its kind in Bulgaria, gives an idea of Varna's turbulent history. When it was founded in 1888 by a group of teachers under Karel Shkorpil, it was a small collection. The museum is in what used to be the Girls' High School building, a long-standing landmark and source of pride for the town. The exhibits were displayed in several classrooms. Built to the design by a famous Bulgarian architect, Petko Momchilov, it was the biggest school house in the Balkans. Its Italian Renaissance style makes it one of Varna's most attractive buildings.

Gradually the former school became too narrow and outdated. In 1983 it was reconstructed and given to the museum.

An imposing main entrance with semicircular arches and an elegant Ionian-style colonnade lead to one of the richest collections in Bulgaria: 55 000 exhibits from the Old Stone Age (100 000 BC) to the Late Middle Ages. The exhibition themes have been developed in par-

allel in its spacious halls. The first consists of the wealth of relics of the historical past, found in the area and well preserved. The second is dedicated to modern Bulgarian art.

The entire first floor tells the fascinating story of the town's development during the Stone, Bronze and Iron Ages, Greek and Roman periods, the Middle Ages and the period of the Ottoman domination. The numerous exhibits have great historic and artistic value. They also testify to the enormous amount of work done by the archaeologists and museum experts. The museum possesses a rich collection of tomb-stone reliefs and votive plaques, depicting the main Thracian deity - the Thracian Horseman. The earliest of them, dated around the 1st century BC, were found in a sanctuary near Cape Galata. Hundreds of archaeological finds are evidence of an advanced civilization on the western shores of the Black Sea, when the settlements on the banks of the inland Varna lakes were some of its main centres.

The medieval department starts with the Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians. It is interesting to look at the Old Bulgarian runic inscriptions on stone. The two seals of the Bulgarian kings Boris I and his son Simeon, found near Varna, are also on display. You can also see glazed ceramics, various jewels, works from Asia Minor and Chinese porcelain. A hall, specially set aside, displays 14th century gold and silver jewels which are the only collection in the Balkans.

In one of the second-floor wings you can see a splendid collection of icons dated 16th to 19th centuries. Many of them have interesting histories. In an adjoining room, numerous valuable Russian icons, brought back by traders or donated to the Varna clergy, can be admired. Another focus of interest is formed by exquisite wood-carved altars and silverware used in church service.

The modern art gallery displays original paintings by National Revival artists and canvases by well-known Bulgarian masters: Vladimir Dimitrov - The Master, Gencho Obreshkov, Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, Stoyan Venev, etc. The art gallery continues to be enriched also with graphics, sculptures, and works of applied art.

There are two other halls for guest-exhibitions from the country and abroad so that the permanent museum exhibits will always be complemented with new and interesting pieces of art.

Special halls house Europe's most ancient gold treasure. The amazing discovery took place in 1972. During excavations for an underground cable for Varna, several hundred metres away from the Lake of Varna, workmen found by accident an ancient tomb with a pile of gold objects. A team of archaeologists of the Varna Archaeological Museum, headed by Ivan Ivanov, arrived on the spot and started to work over it. Thus the earliest worked gold in the history of mankind was discovered in the Chalcolithic Necropolis ("Chalcolithic" is the name given to the era when Neolithic man began to smelt copper - the last quarter of the 4th millennium BC). By 1976 they had dug up and analyzed 0.3 hectares, over which area they discovered 265 graves with a total of nearly 6 kg of 23.5 carat gold fine objects. Tomb 36, for example, contained gold articles weighing 1.5 kg.

The necropolis was unusual in that it had many graves where effigies, rather than human dead, were buried. In some of the tombs the skeletons were in a curled-up position, while in others they lay flat, and still others contained only fragments of bones. The human skeleton in grave 43, in a good state of preservation, was identified as a 40- to 50-year old man, apparently a rich noble. He was buried with more than 100 jewels intended for different parts of the body. The man is thought to have been of an Europoid type of a race which inhabited South West Europe long before the Thracians.

Items found in the graves were locally made of copper, bone, shell, stone, marble, and gold in the form of idols, vessels, pottery, worship objects, tools, and ornaments. They bore no resemblance to anything else discovered on the Balkan Peninsula. So Bulgaria once was the home of the earliest European civilization which had appeared before those of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The gold articles were the first in the world to have been crafted by human hand.

The great amount of gold and the different kinds of graves - symbolic and real, gave rise to many questions about the social structure and the way of life of those ancient people. It may be assumed that the attributes of a particular social status were buried as substitutes for the man of that status. Such practices are known to have existed in many archaic cultures. When the sacral time of power has run out, the king has to die ritually in order to restore the very institution. Deprived

of his old attributes, the king dies socially, and the symbol is retained. It seems that the symbolic tomb 36 can be considered to be a substitute burial of the ruler who was actually buried in tomb 43. These are the two richest and probably the earliest tombs in the whole necropolis. They are sited symmetrically to a group of tombs which are of exceptional interest in the overall ideological system of the necropolis. The most important objects found are three clay masks whose features are marked by small gold pieces and have diadems around their heads. Beside them are three symbolic graves which were quite rich in gold and, as with most male tombs, contained a smith's tools. This arrangement cannot be accidental. It reflects a particular mythology and religious conception.

The necropolis is structured in imitation of society - it contains pantheons, forefathers and kings. The other world is a reflection of the real society, from which it is divided by the lake - the constant mythical border between the two worlds. So it might be presumed that social wealth was used for sacral rather than political ends, because the king figure in archaic societies was always sacred and not so much political as that of a mediator between the society he represented and the gods. It was he who provided his people with fertility, plenty, and health. Therefore the large quantity of gold is evidence not so much of a developed social hierarchy as of developed ideas about the sacrality of the king figure or rather of the tribal chieftain.

The gold articles were first shown at the sensational exhibition in Japan, and even the reticent Japanese called it "The earliest gold of mankind. The first civilization in Europe."

The eminent Russian expert in ancient metallurgy, Evgeni Nikolaevich, called it the "Uncompleted Civilization". Why? From 1971 to 1974 he directed studies of a number of ancient mines and deposits in Bulgaria. He proved that copper had enabled people to manufacture better implements of labour with great ease, which was highly valued. Thus ancient merchants acquired large amounts of wealth, which led to their invasion by nomadic tribes. Gradually all settlements were set on fire, and by about 4000 BC the whole area was abandoned. This is called "a temporary interruption of human activity" by archaeologists.

The discovery of this Chalcolithic Necropolis proved that Bulgaria had been one of the cradles of European culture.

Another sight worth seeing is Varna's Ethnographic Museum, one of Bulgaria's finest. The exhibits are displayed in a beautiful typical Varna house, built in 1860, during the National Revival period. They give the idea of the varied culture of the population of Varna and its region from the second half of the 19th and early 20th century. In fact the house itself is an exhibit with its small front garden and old fountain.

Downstairs lie reminders of the region's traditional trades and occupations. The first ones are of agricultural character: a small plough used at the end of the last century, harvesting and threshing implements and vessels for storing grain. Here, too, you can learn something about the old Bulgarian custom of "leaving the beard on the field", that is a few stalks left standing so that the field might bear again the following year. These stalks would be made into artistic plaits bound with a red thread, garlic and daisies.

Viniculture is widespread along the Bulgarian coast today, and its wines are renowned in many parts of the world. This culture dates back to 2000 BC, when the Thracians brought the vine over from India. The method of winemaking and the grape-presses in the museum are Thracian. Their tradition was continued by the Bulgarians. The vessel itself is interesting, being made of a single piece of wood and used for crushing grapes.

On the first floor, there is a fine display of regional costumes, showing the great diversity of styles, largely because the area inland of Varna was a crossroads of migrating people. It was through the traditional costumes that the demographic characteristics of the Varna region were established. The embroidery is geometrical, and the colour combinations seem modernistic to us now. The oldest examples were embroidered with silk threads and coloured with herbal dyes. The costumes are supplemented by ornaments, clasps, belts, rings, bangles and necklaces which give the costume a festive air. You can see a wedding scene of a distinct local group called "chenge" from the village of Asparoukhovo, 50 km west of Varna. Costumed dummies are grouped around a ceremonial wooden wedding sledge, with the bride surround-

ed by men in black hats wreathed with flowers and accompanied by the slightly menacing figure of the village matchmaker, holding high up a black cockerel. Other items are related to regional folk beliefs. They include the embroidered masks worn during "Koukeri" in spring and "Sourvakari" connected with New year rites.

Further on we can see dogwood twigs which were the symbol of a rich table. They are decorated with the fruits of the earth or those produced by the hands of the good householder.

Also on display are a variety of artistic shapes of ritual loaves, baked to mark specific occasions: The Kravai for New Year and Saint John's Day, The Pony (Konche) for St. Theodor's Day; or the Proshtupalnik - shaped like a baby's foot, to celebrate a child's first steps. They all express hopes and wishes for health, fertility and good luck.

The next storey of the house re-creates the atmosphere and furnishings of a peasant room and a well-to-do townsman's house of the late 19th and early 20th century.

The museum is comparatively young, and yet it has already 15 000 interesting exhibits.

Being a maritime city, Varna has some very interesting places to visit. One of them is Varna's Dolphinarium, housed in an attractive building which seats 1 200, having two pools, a large and a small one, and a coffee-shop. From the latter, through 8 underwater portholes, you can see the inside of the small pool and part of the large one. So you can sit comfortably while watching the dolphins swim around, sometimes just a yard away.

The Dolphinarium is not just used for shows, but for research work, too. The dolphins' development is followed as they grow, and they are trained to do various useful things. They are used as life-savers, and they also help in the discovery of sunken ships. It takes the trainers at least two years to fully train a dolphin. Every training session takes a great deal of concentration and patience. If the dolphins have been overloaded, the trainer might suddenly find that all their efforts have been in vain. But dolphins are intelligent creatures, and the trainers count on their intelligence as much as on their own efforts to bring the audience even more interesting performances.

At the western end of the seaside park is the Naval Museum. Its exhibits were collected when, after 1878, the Bulgarian Navy were established, thanks to the efforts of Karel Shkorpil and Olga Polubolyarova - the museum's first curator.

Ship and coastal guns, anchor equipment, shells and others are on display in the park of the museum.

In 1957 the gunboat called "Drazki" (Intrepid) was embedded outside the museum. It had played an important part during the Balkan War of 1912 - on November 21 it sank the Turkish cruiser "Hamidie" off Cape Kaliakra and won Bulgarian Navy's first victory. Later the famous Bulgarian revolutionary poet, Nikola Vaptsarov, was in training on it.

In 1919 the Bulgarian Navy was greatly reduced by the Neuilly Treaty; during the Second World War it collaborated with Hitler's Naval Forces. So there weren't any important military operations worth mentioning.

The 12 halls on two levels contain exhibits connected with the history of navigation in the Black Sea and the lower Danube back to its earliest days. Special attention is paid to the Russian Black Sea fleet and its victories over the Ottoman empire during the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78.

Just beyond is the Aquarium - the only one of its kind in Bulgaria. In January 1906, in Evksinograd, king Ferdinand decided to open a marine station and the Varna authorities allowed him to use a site for no money. The building was designed by architect Dabkov and the foundation stone was laid in 1907. The museum was completed in 1912 and just as it was about to open, the First Balkan War broke out. Bulgarian troops were stationed, refugees were put up and foreign troops were quartered here. After the Great War the museum housed the fishery school. The University of Sofia, the official owner of the building, acquired it in 1930, and the marine station was opened on September 17, 1932.

The facade of the Aquarium is singular: the basreliefs of a huge pearl oyster and characteristic Black Sea wildlife. Later, after 1954, it housed a collection of numerous creatures, typical of the flora and fauna in the seas and oceans near India, South America, Indonesia and

Oceania. Some of them are common, but others are very rare and interesting. You can see seawater specimens of the Black Sea fauna - sea-anemone, crabs, rapanas (which came to the Black Sea a couple of decades ago), the Black Sea turbot, which assumes the colouring of the rocks and disguises itself against other preying animals, the Black Sea sturgeon, bluefish, hausen, mackerel, thornback ray, weever, the Black Sea salmon, etc.

Freshwater fishes form another part of the exhibition. There are trouts, sheatfishes, carps, the freshwater sturgeon (its roe is a source of caviar), which can grow to a length of 9 m. in the wild, etc. One of the most interesting species are the sea-needles. They cover the distance of about 11 000 km. to the Sargasso Sea without eating, There they reproduce when the female deposits her eggs on the male, who is expected to do the brooding, and then dies. The young sea-needles reach the shores of Europe a few years later. You can also see stuffed animals and other invertebrate inhabitants of the Black Sea.

## **28. The Early Byzantine Heritage**

For the Balkan Peninsula the Early Byzantine Period (5th-6th centuries) was a period of transition from Antiquity to Medieval culture and was characterized by important economic, social and ethnic changes, forming the basis on which later, in the 7th c., the Bulgarian state was established and the foundations of Bulgarian culture were laid. During this period the lands of modern Bulgaria were the northern border possessions of the Byzantine Empire and were therefore well defended. The fortresses of the frontier towns were strengthened, new roads were built, secular and religious buildings were erected. The ports on the Black Sea coast were kept in good order and the fortresses along the lower course of the Danube were supplied with piped water. The great number of bricks with masons' marks and other finds speak of the building activity of that time, which was the greatest during the reigns of Theodosius and Arcadius according to historical sources.

From the middle of the 5th c. till the end of the 6th c. the Balkans were shaken by Barbarian invasions. About 70 towns, including Odessos, Marcianopolis, Philippopolis and others, were demolished. These were reconstructed and new fortresses were built by Emperor Justinian the Great, whose reign was a period of economic stabilization. Many Early Christian churches are thought to date from that time.

Despite the disturbed and deteriorating living conditions, economic and cultural activities continued. The settlements along the Black Sea coast and those to the south of the Balkan Range went on developing throughout the 6th c. Written sources show that during almost the whole of the 5th and 6th centuries Serdica (Sofia), Odessos (Varna), Philippopolis (Plovdiv), Pautalia (Kyustendil), Beroe (Stara Zagora), Durostorum (Silistra) and others were rich towns enjoying a high standard of living.

A characteristic feature of that period are the numerous additional fortification structures in the above mentioned old Roman towns. A number of public buildings, barracks and work buildings were erected. However, church building was the greater part of the construction activity in today's Bulgaria's lands during the Early Byzantine period.

The churches of that period were badly damaged over the ages and have reached us in ruins. Some of them have lost their individuality, others have been covered over. Some bear traces of later alterations which makes it difficult to trace down the original architectural type. Nevertheless, what has been preserved till now helps us recognize the planning and compositional principles, the building techniques and the aesthetic concepts of the period.

At that time church architecture had two basic tasks - to glorify the Christian hero and to satisfy the needs of the Christian community. Thus, although all Early Christian church types were represented, two types predominated in the period - the rotunda and the basilica.

The circular structures - rotundas - were erected over the tombs of martyrs who had died for the Christian religion. Later they served as baptismal churches. The tomb with the relics of the martyr was in the centre of the building. The baptismal font was there too. The traditions of mausoleums and burial mounds can easily be traced in these earliest churches which possess a lot of elements typical of the antique architecture. They are well-balanced and stately, with a dome rising gently above the central area, surrounded by a colonnade.

The three-aisled basilica, the plan of which corresponded best to the requirements of the Early Christian cult, was the most widespread type and there are remains of about 60 such structures in Bulgaria today.

The main function of the basilicas was to serve as places where all members of the community gathered to worship as well as to discuss important matters sometimes. During the antique period temples of this type were almost unknown. The Greek and Roman temples were their gods' homes. Offerings were made in front of them in the open air. The new religion - Christianity allotted a much more important part to the worshippers. They all gathered in the Christian temple,

symbolising the union of the community and the church. The Early Christian basilicas' prototypes can be found in the architecture of ancient Rome. The interior of the Roman temples was also divided by colonnades typical of the basilicas of the Early Christian period. But the latter are oriented to the east where the huge semicircle of the only apse stood. It was there that the holy sacraments were administered in front of the eyes of the worshippers.

The murals in the basilicas were arranged in keeping with the architectural concept. They were centred in the altar semicircle and the arch above the altar. The huge figure of Jesus Christ surrounded by his disciples was depicted above the altar. Episodes of legends, immortalising God's victories as well as his sufferings, were painted on the side walls. The Byzantine Emperors at that time had an absolute power and a complete control over the church. This influenced the clerical hierarchy and was reflected in the mural painting. Christ the Saviour was depicted dressed as a ruler (Pantocrator), sitting on the heavenly throne, surrounded by angels. Saints reach out their hands to him, begging mercy or lie face down like courtiers in front of their almighty emperor. At that time painting was under the strict control of the church authorities. They imposed types of canonical depictions. The technique preferred in wall painting during the Early Byzantine period was the mosaic. Its origin can be traced down to Antiquity. The Roman and Greek masters used the mosaic as a flooring. The Byzantine mosaic masters used all colours in the spectrum from their palest to the brightest shades. They loved gold because it was the symbol of wealth and luxury and the brightest of all colours.

Three main types of the three-aisled basilica existed in modern Bulgaria's lands: with a wooden roof, with a vaulted covering and with a dome. The group of basilicas with wooden roofs, the largest of the three, belongs to a trend known as the Mediterranean artistic circle. The structures are remarkable for their generous dimensions and characteristic Hellenistic silhouette, in which the nave is higher than the aisles. There are basilicas built under the influence of the church architecture in Asia Minor and Syria. Many of the structures are of interesting architectural design and show a creative development by not sticking to the well-known types of the Byzantine world only. Architectural

forms mingled, foreign influences were assimilated and works of the local building schools appeared in the territory of ancient Thrace. Examples of this are the basilica Sveta Sofia in Sofia, the Basilica in Belovo, the Elenska church near Pirdop, the Red Church near Perushtitsa, the Old Metropolitan Church in Nessebar, and others.

Later, based on the local building and architectural tradition created in this period, Bulgarian Medieval architecture emerged.

## 29. The First Bulgarian Kingdom

From the end of the 4th century on to the second half of the 7th century, the lands which were to become the place of origin of the First Bulgarian State (the banks of the Lower Danube) were under the rule of Byzantium, also known as the Eastern Roman Empire. These lands were often attacked by different tribes, but the empire managed somehow to ward them off. This was the period of the clash between the declining antiquity and the new barbarian world, which was vigorous and energetic. The very act of the foundation of the Bulgarian state might seem to have taken a short time, but actually, the preparation for it had already started long before the 7th century.

The Slav tribes began to migrate into the Balkan Peninsula from the late 5th century. By the end of the 6th century and the beginning of the 7th century, they managed to break through the Byzantine defences along the Danube. It took them only a few decades to settle down south of the river, and gradually, all over the peninsula. Soon, they began to outnumber the Thracians in the area. Their close contacts led to throwing off the Slav social primitivism, and achieving a particularly high level of development at the time. Tribal alliances began to arise, the biggest of them in the region of Moesia (between the banks of the Danube and the Balkan Range), uniting the Seven Slav Tribes and the tribe called Severs in a kind of a pre-state structure. This tribal union played the mayor role in the foundation of the Bulgarian state when, around 680, a large group of horsemen of Turkic-Altain origin, led by Khan Asparoukh, reached the Danube deltas and soon entered the lands lying south of the river. It was Moesia where they made their first contacts with the Slav tribal union.

Meanwhile, Byzantium was engaged in a continuous war against the Arabs, but it could not but react to the shaping up of the Slav-Bulgarian alliance, which would seriously reduce its influence

over the region of Dobroudzha. The Byzantine emperor, Constantine IV Pogonatus, sent his troops against the newcomers in 680, but he suffered a great defeat. Having won the battle, Asparoukh concluded an alliance with the Slavs in the autumn of 680. This act marked the formation of the Slav-Bulgarian State. Finally, the united efforts of the war-like Proto-Bulgarians and the numerous Slavs forced the mighty Byzantine Empire to recognize the existence and rights of the newly-founded state in the autumn of 681.

The tribes that laid the foundations of their own state were rather different in their ways of life and types of economy: the Slavs engaged in agriculture, while the Proto-Bulgarians bred cattle, but, on the other hand, they supplemented their common life. The Khanate was structured in a unique manner: the two ethnic groups lived separately - the Proto-Bulgarians settled down around the first Bulgarian capital of Pliska and assumed the supreme rule, but they strictly respected the autonomy of the Slav princes living in tribal communities. This type of administrative dualism lasted for nearly 150 years. Although the Khanate relied heavily on Slav strength, it was the vitality and martial spirit of the Proto-Bulgarians that helped the expansion of the state.

In its social and political system, the Bulgarian state did not differ greatly from the other feudal states of its time. There were two principal classes: the land-owning aristocracy and the free peasants, who leased land from the aristocrats. But the existence of the state was not ensured, and it had to fight for its survival. Besides, it went through internecine struggles, unrests, heavy taxations, and other hardships, which gradually ruined the peasants, turning them easily into serfs.

Soon after the foundation of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, the state started to consolidate and expand. Under Khan Tervel (701-718), who is said to have been Asparoukh's son, Bulgaria became stronger and achieved international recognition and prestige in the system of political relations in South-Eastern Europe. The Khan skilfully pursued his aims, and took advantage of the internal unrest in Byzantium. In 705, Khan Tervel helped the dethroned Byzantine emperor Justinian II regain his father's crown. To express his gratitude, the Emperor gave him the royal title of Caesar (Kessar), which was not only honorary and symbolic, but also expressed the Empire's attitude to the Bulgarian

ruler. Khan Tervel was also given the Zagore district, which was the first expansion of the young state south of the Balkan Range.

Bulgarian's growth was greatest during the reign of Khan Kroum (803-814), called the Terrible. He was a remarkable commander and the state's first legislator. He defeated the Avars and the Byzantines, and added new lands across the Danube and the Balkan Range to the Bulgarian territories.

Khan Kroum captured Serdica, which was a heavy blow to the Byzantine Empire, and set out to incorporate the Slavs of Macedonia. Emperor Nicephorus I Genicus decided to invade Bulgaria, and headed a numerous army in May 811. The capital of Pliska was seized and burnt, the peace proposals - rejected. But the Emperor made a great mistake - he spent too much time ravaging the area. Khan Kroum organized his troops and blocked the eastern passes of the Balkan Mountains. On his way back, on July 26th, 811, the Byzantine army was ambushed and defeated at the Varbitsa Pass. The Emperor himself was killed in this battle. This was the greatest defeat Byzantium had suffered to that day. Khan Kroum pushed his boundaries as far as the Rila Mountains in the west, the Rhodopes in the south, the Carpathians in the north, and the Dniester River in the east. The expansion of the state led to a prolonged peace with Byzantium, which provided the further development of the country. The first laws against theft, slander and drunkenness were issued; palaces, fortresses and bridges were constructed; arts and architecture flourished. Khan Kroum wanted to capture Constantinople, but on April 13th, 814, he died, most probably killed.

The Bulgarian throne was occupied by his son, Khan Omourtag (814-831), who continued to make ravages throughout the Byzantine lands, and turned down the peace proposals of Leo V. The decisive battle between the two rulers took place in the autumn of 814, when the Byzantines won a major victory. This failure compelled Khan Omourtag to open peace talks, and in 815, a 30-year peace treaty was signed in Constantinople. Thus, the Khan had the opportunity to manage his problems to the north. Omourtag is also credited as the first creator of material culture in the 9th century. He restored the burnt-down capital of Pliskà and turned it into a real medieval town.

It is said that the highest achievement of the Bulgarian state is

the merging of Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians into one ethnic group. This process was favourably influenced by the adoption of Christianity as the official religion of the state in 864.

At that time, the Bulgarian state was opened up to Byzantine culture. The Bulgarian people had no religion, no script, no cultural traditions, and it was considered a “barbarian” state. The next Bulgarian ruler, Khan Boris, decided to convert his vast state into the religion of the Christian world. Besides, the ethnic groups within it still worshipped different gods, which began to hamper the process of their gradual merger.

Khan Boris had matured for the idea of the conversion after much hesitation and doubt. Initially, he had chosen the Western Church in order to stop the Byzantine influence on Bulgaria. Byzantium’s blow came immediately: in the autumn of 863 the Byzantine army invaded Bulgaria and won the battle. Emperor Michael III set down a single condition - the Bulgarians should be converted by the Constantinople Church. In early 864, Byzantine clerics arrived in Pliska. The Byzantine Emperor himself became godfather of the Bulgarian ruler, and that is why Boris adopted the Christian name Michael. The pagan title Khan was replaced by the Slav “knyaz” (prince).

Christianity, however, was not new to our lands. The greater part of the Slavs had already been Christianized long before 864, a fact that strengthened their position in the Bulgarian Kingdom. The act of conversion was seriously opposed by many nobles of Proto-Bulgarian origin, but Boris Michael I managed to put down the unrest headed by 52 boyars by having them and their families killed.

The autonomy of the Bulgarian Church was another important problem. A result of Boris’s brilliant diplomatic skills was the decision, taken in 870, that Bulgaria should have an independent church head with the title of Archbishop.

The shrewd statesman had also realized the threat coming from the fact that sermons were held in the Greek language, which was gradually turning into the official language of Bulgaria. The Prince was aware of the creation of the Slav script by the Thessaloniki missionaries Cyril and Methodius in 865. After the death of both brothers,

having been expelled from Moravia in 886, their disciples were warmly welcomed by the Bulgarian Prince in Pliska. The Slav tongue was adopted as the official language of Bulgaria and Bulgarian Church. Now Boris was able to throw off Byzantium's influence. In 893, the Prince convened a popular council which took decisions of great importance: the Slav language was proclaimed official, Preslav was declared capital of Bulgaria in order to avoid the pagan influence of Pliska, and Boris's third son, Simeon, ascended the throne.

Boris I died on May 2nd, 907 at the age of 80. Immediately after his death, the Bulgarian Church canonized him.

It was Simeon's turn to fulfil his father's will. After a 2-year war against Byzantium (894-896), he started to create the basis of his future success. His major concern was the construction of the new capital, which took him 28 years. The city was the reflection of the high achievements of Bulgaria's material culture.

The Tzar also initiated the nationalization of the Bulgarian Church, asserting the Orthodox Christianity with churches erected throughout the country. Gradually, all the churches were headed by Bulgarian bishops, thus confirming the spiritual independence of the people.

What is more, Simeon became the centre of an intellectual circle which laid the foundations of a new culture based on the Slav script. This is the reason why his reign is known as the Golden Age of Bulgarian Letters and Arts. Many eminent enlighteners and men of letters were gathered in Preslav. They translated Christian works and created new ones. Simeon himself was occupied with translating and writing books. Naoum, John the Exarch, Constantine of Preslav, Chernorizets Hrabar (who is thought to have been the Bulgarian ruler), and many others worked in the palaces and monasteries. During the first 12 years of his reign, his achievements and personal prestige ranked him among the most prominent men of his time.

But Simeon had another objective - to take Bulgaria out of the shadow of Byzantium. In August 913, he launched a campaign against Constantinople and besieged the city. He wanted to be proclaimed "Vassilevs" (king) of the Bulgarians. He also offered a diplomatic marriage between his daughter and Emperor Constantine VII. In return he

promised sound peace. The Patriarch himself performed the coronation ceremony, and in 913, Simeon got the royal title, which made him equal to the Byzantine Emperor. But in 914, the new Byzantine government denied Simeon's royal rights. Another long war followed. It ended in a complete defeat of the Byzantine army on August 20th, 917, near Akheloi. Some years later, in early September 923, Simeon started his next march against Constantinople and laid down his conditions. Finally, in 926, the Bulgarian ruler was crowned to be a King in Preslav.

Tzar Simeon died of a heart attack on May 27th, 927 at the age of 63, having created a new empire and a new civilization.

The next Bulgarian Tzar was Peter I (927-969), who managed to preserve Simeon's military achievements, but he was rather indecisive, and could not avail himself of the internecine strifes in Byzantium. On the other hand, the long wars and heavy taxations exhausted and ruined the peasantry, which bred discontent with the feudal order. This gave rise to the Bogomils, a movement named after its leader, the priest Bogomil (beloved of God). The Bogomils preached that all material things were evil, a creation of the Devil, and only the human soul could be good. That's why the movement was strongly critical of the Bulgarian ruling class and the clergy, and rejected church and state. This heresy spread in France and Italy, and its adherents were severely persecuted.

The Bulgarian state was weakened, and the reigns of Peter I and his son, Boris II, were marked by conflicts among the boyars, and decline.

In 968, Prince Svetoslav of Kiev raided the Bulgarian territories. At first, the Byzantines helped the new Bulgarian Tzar, Boris II (969-971), who ruled over northeastern Bulgaria. It turned out that the Russian aggression caused the conquest of this part of Bulgaria in 971, because of the presence of Byzantine troops on its territory. The Byzantines captured Boris II and took the crown of Simeon the Great off.

The western part of Bulgaria, with Ohrid as its capital, was governed by Tzar Samuil (997-1014). He managed to preserve its independence for some more decades. In June 1014, at the head of an enormous army, the Byzantine Emperor Basil II invaded the area. The

Bulgarians suffered heavy losses, and about 15 000 of them were taken prisoners in the battle at Stroumitsa. The Emperor could not capture the fortress and committed a unique crime - he had the captives blinded and sent back to their Tzar. After seeing his maimed troops, Samuil died of a heart attack on October 6th, 1014. Basil II was called The Bulgar-Slayer.

Four years later, the last Bulgarian Tzar, Ivan Vladislav (1015-1018), was killed by the Byzantines. Finally, Byzantium's dream came true - the independent Bulgarian state was crushed. The Bulgarian lands fell under Byzantine domination, which was to last 167 years.

The Byzantine rule caused a lot of unfavourable changes. In the course of the bitter duel, Bulgaria suffered great material and human losses. Vast areas, especially in present-day Macedonia, were put to unprecedented devastation and looting; thousands of people were killed, maimed, and banished to the remotest Byzantine border areas in Asia Minor and Armenia. Byzantium tried to turn the conquered state into an ordinary province. The development of the Bulgarian people was interrupted by introducing the Byzantine economic social order.

Bulgarian aristocracy was gradually "denationalized"; the nobility left the country and merged with the Byzantine ruling oligarchy. The Byzantine domination quickened the already started process of social differentiation and feudalization

During the years of Byzantine rule, the Bulgarians sustained great ravages by the Pechenegs, Coumans and other nomads; the First and Second Crusades forced their way across our lands; the Magyars and Italians invaded the country many times. On the other hand, the Byzantine conquerors robbed and ill-treated the people. They also tried to destroy Bulgarian culture. But the Bulgarian people never resigned themselves to oppression. Revolts followed each other. In 1040, an uprising led by Peter Delyan, broke out in the region of Belgrade. It was partly successful in restoring the old kingdom, but within a year, it was put down.

Other insurrections followed in 1072 and 1084, later some more, but all of them were suppressed. However, temporary failures did not crush the people's resolution and faith: they showed the Byzantine conquerors that the days of their domination were numbered.

## **30. Madara**

Some 10 km east of the town of Shoumen in Northeastern Bulgaria, the cult centre of the pagan Bulgarian State, there is a range of cliffs that shows signs of human occupation dating back to the 3rd century BC. This archaeological site is known under the name of Greek origin meaning “treeless, bare”, and is situated on a plateau bearing the same name. This part of Bulgaria is exceptionally rich in natural beauties and archaeological finds dating to Late Antiquity and the Middle Ages. Thracians, Romans, Byzantines, medieval Bulgarians, and Turks have left traces here.

On the way to the Large Cave you can see a grain store dating from the 5th or 6th century AD, which contained provisions for the fortress garrison. There, enormous clay vessels were sunk into the ground to keep cool.

The Large Cave itself is a magnificent place that has preserved remnants of different times. It is a natural shelter protected by three stone walls, looking like a stage. It has excellent acoustics. In the 1st century BC, there used to be a Thracian sanctuary dedicated to the three nymphs of nature, waters, and forests. A fragment of a stone relief of their images was found here, as well as Greek amphorae and votive tablets. Some of these artifacts can be seen in the local museum.

Another interesting sight is the so called Small Cave, which was inhabited by Neolithic man. The way of life of its dwellers is illustrated by the numerous ceramic, bone, and flint objects and amulets found here. They are also exhibited in the local museum.

Now we are passing by a church cut out in the rock in the 13th century. The archaeological site of Madara has also preserved the remains of a Bulgarian monastery from the 12th century, another church from the 14th century, and a rock monastery from the 12th to the 14th century, which was inhabited by hermits.

No doubt, of greatest interest here is the rock-hewn horseman, a monument unique of its kind. Together with three other well-known Bulgarian monuments (The Thracian Tomb near Kazanlak, The Boyana Church in Sofia, and the rock churches near Ivanovo village, Rousse district), the Madara Horseman is under the protection of UNESCO, in recognition of its world importance.

The basrelief has been known to scholars since the end of the last century, but it is still the subject of much attention by specialists and tourists. It was carved into the face of a rock 120 m high at a height of 23 m from the ground. The relief depicts a moving to the right horseman, riding a stallion, accompanied by a hound and a bird. One of his hands holds the reins, the other one looks as if it has just thrown a spear at the lion lying before the horse's legs. The figures are slightly larger than life size.

There are three inscriptions in Greek around them. The inscription above is from 705-707. It relates how Khan Tervel helped the Byzantine emperor Justinian II to regain his throne. We find the name "Bulgarians" in it for the first time. Actually, it is the first written home source about the connections between the Moesian and Macedonian Bulgarians. The left inscription below dates back to 739-756 - the reign of Khan Kormisosh. Other scholars think that the Greek form of Khan Kroum's name is carved in this inscription and on the skull-goblet in the horseman's right hand. The right inscription is from the time of Khan Omourtag (814-831). Both of the latter inscriptions testify to the Bulgarian -Byzantine relations at that time.

Unfortunately, the relief and the inscriptions are in a very bad state. They are rather eroded due to weathering and age, and endangered by vertical cracks. Some objects are clear only in general form, others are fully effaced.

Much has been written about this monument. Many scholars have tried to interpret the relief. Initially, it was considered as to be dating back to Late Antiquity, and later to the Middle Ages. In 1954, a team sent by the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences established the fact that the relief belongs to the Proto-Bulgarian tradition. However, other scholars still consider that it is closely linked with images of the Thracian horseman. Our ancient forefathers believed that a horse, sac-

rified at a funeral, would bear the soul of the dead man to the other-world, where it would serve him. It is quite probable that the relief is a combination of the cult images of the Thracians and Proto-Bulgarians. Differences of opinion remained concerning the ruler depicted in the relief. Some scholars see in him Khan Kroum or Khan Omourtag, but all the participants in the research of 1954 agree that the depiction on the rock of Madara is of a triumphant scene symbolizing the victorious Bulgarian ruler Khan Tervel and the great power of the young state. The wounded fallen lion, the strongest of all animals, is a symbol of the defeated enemy - the Byzantine Empire. Besides, the comparison between the carving and the horseman depicted on Tervel's shield on a lead seal bears much similarity between the two figures on horseback.

Despite its bad condition, the monument still contains enough information about its origin and the former glory of the First Bulgarian state.

On the terrace, north of the Horseman, there is an imposing ensemble of cult buildings used by the Old Bulgarians. The foundations of a large three-aisled basilica from the second half of the 9th century can still be seen above the remains of a pagan temple. Over 150 monk cells, churches and tombs, situated in three rows, were cut into the rock.

Countless steps, also cut into the rock, lead up to a white-stone fortress, built in the 5th or 6th century AD. Erected on the impressive cliffs of Madara, it played an important role during the Bulgarian Middle Ages, guarding the approaches to the Bulgarian capitals. Some historians identified it with the fortress of "Moundraga", which is mentioned in the chronicles of Tzar Simeon's wars. It is a work of Early Byzantine architecture on Bulgarian lands. Inaccessible from the south and west, the fortress was encircled by a thick stone wall to the north and east. Now remains of the massive walls stand up to 2.4 m high dressed stone. Its main entrance was placed to the west, flanked by 2 pentagonal towers and protected by a double door. Another big rectangular tower was built in the north-eastern corner. The remains of 3 single-roomed structures and one small single-aisled church have been found in the area. A wooden staircase built in the crevice linked the

fortress with the foot of the cliff. The fortification was mentioned in historical sources in reference to events in 1388 and 1444, and its fall to the Turks in 1386.

The Late Antiquity (1st-5th century) is represented by a large building called VILLA RUSTICA (agricultural villa), having the plan of an ancient Greek house. Soon a whole settlement grew around it. Today you can see the remains of public baths, an early Christian church, civil and farm buildings nearby.

## 31. Pliska

Probably this broad lush plain, sheltered to the south by almost inaccessible far-stretching hills and peaks, reminded the Proto-Bulgarians of the Volga steppes they had left, and made Khan Asparoukh thrust his banner, a horse's tail, into the soil. On the site of an old Slav settlement, the capital of the First Bulgarian State was built.

Konstantine Irechek and Karel Shkorpil were the first to discover the remains of the mediaeval city near the village Aboba, and soon, in 1889-1890, the initial archaeological excavations were carried out.

The old capital was well guarded by fortifications built on the neighbouring hills and plateaus, and by three belts of ramparts. The outmost belt, a moat and an earthwork, encircled an area of 23 sq. km - the Outer Town. The vast land hosted the mounted troops and was used as pastures for their horses. The common people also used to live here. Their dwellings were dug-outs or ramshackle houses, usually wood-built in the shape of the original Bulgarian yurts. The foundations of many workshops and about 30 churches have been found. Later on, when Khan Omourtag built another fortification at the Ticha river (present-day Kamchia), part of the troops was transferred there, thus leaving more space for the people who engaged mainly in agriculture, stock-breeding and crafts.

Then comes the second line of defence - a stone wall with four gates, surrounding an area of less than one sq. km. This was the Inner Town. It was situated almost in the middle of the Outer Town. On each of its corners, round towers were erected. The wide road from the main entrance - the Eastern Gate, leads to the Large (Omourtag's) Palace.

Finally, a brick wall with massive stone foundations surrounded the smallest fortress - the Citadel. It was the residence of the Khan, the clergy and aristocracy.

The most imposing building is the Large Palace. During its two centuries of existence, the royal court gradually changed its appearance, reflecting the cultural and political development of the young Bulgarian State. The earliest remains on the site of the court are those of fires which must have been used to warm the yurt-type dwellings. It is supposed that the court consisted of yurts, one of which was the Khan's.

In the late 7th and early 8th centuries, due to the rapid development of the state, permanent dwellings started to be built, mainly of wood. One of them has been well researched and probably belonged to one of the first Bulgarian Khans. Besides, pagan shrines were also built. The remains of two of them have been found in the Inner Town

At the turn of the 8th century, the wooden buildings were gradually replaced by massive structures. The plans of some buildings are so unusual as to make them unique in world architecture. The original wooden palace was also replaced by a solid-built stone structure. It was rectangular in shape and contained 63 rooms of different sizes. It was probably built by Khan Kroum. Thick layers of ashes and charcoal show that it was burned down. In all likelihood, the Byzantine emperor Niciphorus I Genicus had it destroyed to ashes in 811. Charred fragments of marble slabs and drainage pipes indicate the rich decoration and highly developed layout of the palace. The remains of two baths, built on the Roman principle, show that Mediterranean traditions and the classical way of life had reached the Bulgarian court. The new thing here is the underground network of tunnels, secretly connecting some of the buildings and leading out of the palace. In one of these tunnels, a fine pottery dining set has been found, probably belonging to Khan Kroum.

The next Bulgarian Khan, Omourtag (814-831), decided to totally rebuild the old ruined buildings. He raised new solid ones, new underground tunnels were excavated, and the palace was built on a three-times larger scale. The plan of the court became more complex. By the end of the 9th century, there were three groups of buildings: government, residential and church buildings. All of them were built of large square stone blocks, painted with red mortar. The throne room of Khan Omourtag stood above all the rest, its interior design being sub-

ordinated to the idea of the Khan's divine origin and might of the state over which he ruled. Perhaps, this was the place where Boris I welcomed the disciples of Cyril and Methodius.

A short distance away you can see the ruins of the Small Palace, where the royal family lived. The palace centre also had a small chapel, built after the conversion to Christianity, a round pool, a bath-house, and the largest reservoir in Europe at that time. There are also traces of a sewerage system and a hypocaust, which shows the high level of material culture of the state. The Small Palace, situated in the citadel, was the best decorated building in the capital.

In 864 Prince Boris I adopted Christianity, which was to put an end to the pagan society. This affected mainly the heathen shrines and temples. Some of them were ruined and abandoned, others were converted to churches. In the following years, the construction of numerous churches and chapels was widespread. The most remarkable of them was the Large Basilica, which was built right after the official adoption of the new religion, 1.5 km away from the Eastern Gate of the stone wall surrounding Pliska in the Outer Town. The reason why it was built there was the great importance of the site to Bulgarian Christianity, a religion which wasn't new to our lands. The fact that items depicting a cross have been found in the area of a former Slav settlement here (consisting of semi-submerged dwellings) shows that the local Slav tribes were baptized well before the 9th century. The death of the first Bulgarian Christian martyr Enravota (Voin being his Slav name) caused the building of a large cruciform martyrium in his memory. The new religion was not welcomed by everyone. During the rebellion of 52 boyars, the martyrium was demolished. Before long, the revolt was crushed, and between 866 and 869 the foundations of the Large Basilica were laid on the same spot. A walkway covered with stone slabs connected it with the royal court and was used for ceremonial processions. Its original layout was influenced by the Western Church, whose clergy was then visiting Bulgaria. Its size and remarkable architecture were designed to inspire respect for the new religion. The monumental building is 100 m long and 30 m wide, constructed of large stone blocks and bricks. However, in 870, the Byzantine clergy returned to Bulgaria. As a result, the basilica was thoroughly re-

designed to meet the new requirements, and was finally completed around 875. The Large Basilica consisted of a spacious atrium, surrounded by portals and a marble colonnade, a narthex and a naos with three naves with a gallery along the upper level. There were also special rooms for the prince and the Archbishop, because it was an archiepiscopal church, too, the cathedral of the first Bulgarian capital. Next to it , there was a room with a clover-shaped font for baptisms and a small mausoleum for the donor of the church - the Bulgarian ruler Boris Michael. After his death and canonization in the early 10th century, the mausoleum was turned into a martyrium in his honour.

After 870 and the establishment of the Bulgarian archiepiscopate over an area of 20, 000 sq. m around the Large Basilica, buildings were erected for the archiepiscopal residence. A covered gallery connected the archiepiscopal palace with the basilica. A whole complex developed round them. The foundations of a 35m-long building that used to be the archbishop's scriptoria, a bath-house, and a furnace have been found. The "didascelia" (school) was located right beside the church.

In the beginning, the local literary school was subordinated to the Greek tradition - everything here was conducted in the Greek language. But the arrival of Cyril and Methodius' disciples in Pliska in 886 enhanced the capital's development as the centre of Slav literature and enlightenment. Prominent teachers and men of letters worked here. They established the Pliska literary school. Later its tradition was continued in Preslav and Ohrid.

Of no lesser interest are the upright stones which are connected with the pagan Proto-Bulgarian funeral rites. Stone pillars and inscribed stone slabs have also been found in and around the old capital. They give information about different building activities, concluded agreements, etc. All of them show the attitude and responsibility of the Bulgarian rulers for the future generations.

Pliska was the Bulgarian capital from its establishment in 681 up to 893, when Preslav became Bulgaria's second capital. It was the witness of impressive military glory, victories and grandeur, the conversion to Christianity, the introduction of the old Bulgarian script, and the most important thing - the successful merging of the Slavs and the

Proto-Bulgarians into one ethnic group. Pliska was the capital during the reigns of the first greatest Bulgarian rulers - Asparoukh, Tervel, Pressian and Boris I. It was then that Bulgaria was one of the most powerful states on the continent, part of the civilized European world.

## **32. Preslav**

The Great Preslav national reserve of history and archaeology lies by the river Goliama Kamchia, some 20 km from the town of Shoumen. It was situated south of the present-day town of Preslav, and occupies an area of 3.5 sq. km. According to the tradition, it had an inner and outer town. The Inner Town (the citadel) was inhabited by the tzar and the feudal aristocracy. The fortified territory of the Outer town was outlined by two concentric fortresses, protected by a double fortress wall, massive battlements, and gates.

Preslav (a Bulgarian name, meaning “glorious”) was the capital of the First Bulgarian State from 893 to 971. By choosing Preslav, Boris I (852-889) and Simeon (893-927) wanted to avoid the pagan influence of the old capital Pliska. The town itself was founded in the first half of the 9th century, under Khan Omourtag, as a military camp with a fortified palace and garrison. During the reign of Tzar Simeon, Preslav was proclaimed capital, establishing itself as the administrative and religious centre during the most powerful and prosperous period of the mediaeval Bulgarian state. Tzar Simeon created Great Preslav - he built and decorated his capital so that it was really incomparable at the time. It was built of impressive white stone. The palaces were the most imposing buildings that dominated the mediaeval city. Simeon replaced the former grim fortress of Omourtag with “high buildings and churches beautified with much stone, wood and colours, and inside with marble and copper, with silver and gold”, as John the Exarch described the beauty of the new capital. Art and crafts developed here and in the numerous monasteries around it under the patronage of the Bulgarian Tzar. The construction and decoration of the royal town took him 28 years.

The ruins of the second Bulgarian capital were first discovered at the end of the 19th century by the local teacher Yordan Gospodinov,

whose grave is at the foot of the imposing Round or Golden Church. Another archaeological excavations were carried out in 1897 by Prof. V. Zlatarski, and later, at the beginning of the 20th century, by the Russian Archaeological Institute in Tzarigrad and by Karel Shkorpil. A lot of artifacts and remains have been found up to now, the most remarkable of which is the Round Church. It is also known as the Golden Church of Tzar Simeon, and was situated in the Outer town, opposite the southern gate of the inner citadel on a picturesque hilly site. Its interesting architectural design makes it a unique work not only of mediaeval Bulgaria, but of world religious architecture as well. It was fortified with thick breast-walls on its northern and eastern sides. The building had three parts: an atrium, a narthex, and a rotunda. The atrium was accessible from the east, north and south. There used to be a well in its centre. Extended to the east, the atrium walls formed two side premises, the southern one was used as a baptistry. The large narthex was built to the east of the atrium. It was divided into three parts by two pairs of columns. The rotunda was covered with a hemispherical dome, probably gilded, which was the reason why the Round Church was also called Golden. The round nave has 12 marble columns in front of the walls, placed 55 cm from the pilasters of the conchs. The eastern conch, bigger than the rest, was used as an altar. Three doors connected the rotunda with the narthex.

The remains of the church show its rich interior decoration. Marble parts of columns and cornices with stylized leaves, colourful tiles and ceramic fragments, stained glass and gold objects have been found here. The walls were covered with full-length images. The splendid structure is thought to date from the beginning of the 10th century. Its unique plan, construction and decoration make it a masterpiece of mediaeval Bulgarian architecture.

The first ceramic fragments of icons were also found by Yordan Gospodinov. Their number is not great. Besides the icon of St. Theodore Stratilate, found in the Monastery of Patleina outside the ancient capital, his finds included the fragments of an icon in relief and several painted ones. In 1927 some more fragments were found at Simeon's Round Church, which finally led to the discovery of workshops for painted icons. Some scholars believe that the art of painted

icons is of Eastern origin, and that Preslav was its first centre in Europe. Others think that it was under Byzantine influence. At that time the rulers used to exchange craftsmen, and naturally, many of them settled in Preslav. They acquainted the potters in the capital with the technology of painted ceramics, which was necessary for the decoration of the newly-built palaces and churches.

However, there could be another explanation. The workshops were located mainly at the monastery complexes. So, it is supposed that the technology and its introduction may have been transferred to Preslav by monks who were in close contacts with numerous monasteries in Constantinople and the Christian East.

The painted ceramic icons of Preslav are among the most interesting examples of the Old Bulgarian art in the late 9th and the first 30 years of the 10th century. This resulted from the high political and cultural achievements of the First Bulgarian State. The icons were made along with glazed china and tableware in the same workshops using the same technique. The 10 workshops found up to now reveal their emergence, style, environment and methods of production. At the close of the 9th century, they were first made in monastery workshops in a place called Touzlaluka. Later, their production spread to the nearby workshops and around the Round Church, and finally reached its highest peak in the Royal Monastery near Preslav and Patleina. The tiles are inscribed with Cyrillic texts, which proves the Bulgarian nationality of the artists.

The wide range of the unearthed icons was first classified by Krustyu Miyatev some 60 years ago, but their recent research has extended their classification. They fall into two main groups:

- monumental icons, composed of individual tiles, and
- small icons, on which the iconographic images and compositions are depicted on single separate panels

Unfortunately, the icons are in a rather fragmentary condition, and we cannot add anything essential to what we know thanks to the icon of St. Theodore from Patleina. The group of the small icons is divided into rectangular and square icons, round medallions with bust images in horizontal or vertical rows, and icons with arc-shaped upper parts, according to their form. The Patleina workshops preferred mon-

umental icons and small rectangular icons, in relief or painted, of saints standing full length; the Touzlaluka workshops produced mainly square icons with waist-length images of the Apostles and the Evangelists; the workshops around the Golden Church specialized in medallion friezes with bust images of archangels and young saints, the workshops at the Royal Monastery usually produced arc-shaped icons representing pairs of saints standing full length, and also Festive Scenes. The ceramic icons from Preslav were an exceptional artistic achievement, which was a marvellous architectural finish of churches and palaces in the mediaeval Bulgarian capital during Simeon's reign.

Going on through the Southern Gate, we pass by some market buildings and enter the Inner Town. The architectural organization of the royal cities was similar to that of other capitals of early mediaeval feudal cities - Byzantium, the Frankish state, the Arab caliphates, and on the Iberian Peninsula. The most important of the buildings associated with the life and reign of Tzar Simeon was 40 m long and 20 m high. Today its remains are in the eastern part of the complex, its façade is turned towards the centre of the city. This building contained the throne-room, which was situated above a high ground floor consisting of arches. These tall arches stood on two rows of columns, 5 m high, made of green marble with white basis and carved capitals. The light came through stained glass windows. The interior was remarkable for its smooth marble and mosaic surfaces, rich multicoloured carpets and gold-threaded drapery. The ruler sat in an oval niche at the south end of the room, with his boyars beside him.

The foundations of another fortified building, parallel to the first, about 60 m in length, seem to have been those of the royal family's residence. The two buildings were connected to the north, across a courtyard, by a richly decorated two-storey building which had a row of rooms. There also were staircases used as a link between the two parts of the palace. Their foundations were made of stone blocks and mortar. The plan of the palace is similar to that in Pliska, but it was more complex and beautiful. Near the palace buildings stood the main cathedral of Christian Bulgaria, many residences, and office buildings. Squares, streets and gardens with fountains beautified the capital. The main square, where people used to congregate on special occasions,

was outside the eastern façade of the throne room. This square was covered with large stone slabs.

The Byzantine Leo Deacon wrote in his history that the royal treasure was kept in the palace, protected by thick walls. The Preslav treasure was discovered by accident in 1978 by some farm workers in a place called Kashtana, about 3 or 4 km northwest of the city. Archaeological studies showed that there was no tomb or other building in this part of the country that might have housed it. Besides, it was buried 60 or 70 cm under the ground. That's why it is supposed that it must have been hurriedly hidden by a noblewoman during the conquest of North Eastern Bulgaria and Preslav in 971 by the Byzantine Emperor John Tzimiskes. The treasure consists mainly of gold and gilded silver articles, including two necklaces, plaques from a diadem, several parts of earrings, buttons and hooks. The rest of 120 items consist of various round, square, cruciform and heart-shaped ornaments for items of rich clothing, executed by different techniques and using different-coloured enamel, emeralds, rock-crystal, glass and pearls. The great skill and excellent knowledge of jewellery techniques of the ancient craftsmen is especially apparent in those pieces where the Byzantine technique of laced enamelling was used. The ornaments on the surfaces are of various kinds: birds, palmettes, the Virgin Mary, peacocks, hunting hounds, rosettes, twisted branches and others. The main part of what remains of the diadem depicts Alexander the Great, riding in a chariot pulled by griffons, while other plates depict only mythical beasts.

There are 15 silver Byzantine coins of Constantine VII and Romanus II (945-969), which determine the age of the treasure and the time it was buried. The Preslav gold treasure shows the high cultural level achieved in the second Bulgarian capital, and the great wealth that had been accumulated by some of the feudal aristocracy of Preslav. Some of the items were imported from Byzantium, others, like the double-sided necklace, the diadems and some of the clothing ornaments were produced by local craftsmen.

During the 10th century, Preslav became the centre of Slav literature thanks to the establishment of Preslav school of letters by the brilliant Bulgarian Tzar Simeon. It is no chance that the years of his

reign were called The Golden Age of Bulgarian Literature and Culture. Eminent men of letters created their noteworthy works here - John the Exarch, Constanine of Preslav, Chernorizetz Hrabur (the brave monk) and Tzar Simeon himself. But of the great wealth of literature created at the time of the First Bulgarian State, only accidentally surviving manuscripts have come down to us. Almost all of these are kept outside our country, or are copies made later. The most ancient Old Bulgarian books such as the Zograph, the Marianus and Asemanianus Gospels were written in the Glagolitic alphabet. Two thirds of all Slav inscriptions discovered in all Slav countries have been found in Preslav. Later, when the Russian Prince Svetoslav and the Byzantine Emperor John Tzimiskes captured, ravaged and burned down the city, the centre of the state and cultural life was transferred to the southwest, to Ohrid, where Climent and Naum, the disciples of Cyril and Methodius had laid the foundations of the Western Bulgarian literary school during the lifetime of Boris I.

The history of Preslav is a turbulent one. Its downfall began, actually, when the Kievian Prince Svetoslav seized it, causing the Byzantine empire to respond by demolishing the town in 972. But the massive walls of the Inner Town were not destroyed, and later the city revived. It was occupied as late as the Assen dynasty, i.e. in the 12th and 13th century, and still used as a feudal stronghold. However, Preslav never restored its former grandeur and was surpassed by Tarnovo, the capital of the Second Bulgarian State. Finally, it was burned down by the Turks, who captured it in 1388. They used the materials from the remains to construct their own buildings, including the Tomboul Mosque in Shoumen.

The Archaeological Museum is housed in a modern concrete building beyond the crest of a hill on the right. The renovated museum exhibition presents in thematic-chronological sequence the basic periods in the development of Great Preslav, richly illustrated by unique monuments, although the most prestigious artifacts have been moved to museums in Sofia and Shoumen.

### **33. The Second Bulgarian Kingdom**

With the collapse of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, the Bulgarian church fell under the domination of Greek clergy who took control of the See of Ohrid and attempted to replace the Bulgarian Slav liturgy with liturgy in the Greek language. Bulgarian culture was by this time too deeply rooted to be easily removed, and the Byzantine Empire, hit by the attacks of the Turks and the disturbances of the crusaders, lacked the power to support a more forcible Hellenization.

In 1185 the population in North Bulgaria rose against the Byzantine authorities. The centre of this popular uprising was Tarnovo, and it was headed by two brothers, the boyars Assen and Peter of Tarnovo. The difficult political crisis enabled Byzantium to put down the rising. It tried to crush the rebel state, but after two attempts in 1187 and 1190, it was finally forced to recognize Bulgarian independence.

In 1187 the victorious troops of the rebels made the Byzantine Empire sign a peace treaty, thus accepting the independence of the Bulgarian lands to the north of the Balkan Range. As a result of this, the foundations of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom, with Tarnovo as its capital, were laid. After a short rule of 10 years, the Assen brothers fell victims to a boyar plot, helped by Byzantium. Their brother and successor Tzar Kaloyan, who ruled from 1197 to 1207, continued consolidating the state. He briefly accepted the supremacy of Roman Church and received a royal crown from the pope. But when the patriarch of Constantinople again recognized the independence of the Bulgarian Church, Kaloyan returned to Orthodoxy. Tzar Kaloyan proved to be a fearless and farsighted statesman, a shrewd diplomat and commander. Besides, he had the people's support. He gradually liberated all the territories which had remained under Byzantine rule - East Moesia, Thrace, Macedonia and the Belgrade region.

When in 1204 Tzar Kaloyan had succeeded in consolidating the

country's international position by concluding a Unia with the Pope, another enemy threatened Bulgaria - the Latin Empire, founded in 1204 by the crusaders, who had settled themselves in Constantinople and had already conquered Byzantium. The Latin Emperor, Baldwin of Flander, rejected Kaloyan's proposals for peace and good-neighbourly relations and haughtily laid claim to certain Bulgarian territories which Kaloyan refused to cede. Neither did he agree to behave to the Latins as a slave to his master. Kaloyan had decided to set out on a daring campaign. On April 15, 1205, the Bulgarian troops managed to defeat the experienced army of crusaders near Adrianople. Emperor Baldwin himself was captured and taken prisoner to the capital of Tarnovo. However, Tzar Kaloyan, alike his brothers, fell victim to a boyars' plot and died before he could take an advantage of his success in 1207.

After his death the country became a scene of internal struggles. A period of anarchy followed under Tzar Boril before Ivan Assen II (1218-41) could restore order and continue the expansion of Bulgarian borders. Under Boril there were Tartar invasions, and cruel persecution of the Bogomils, for whom the only way out of this difficult situation was a rebellion. Boril was removed from the throne, and with the help of the Russians and the people's support Ivan Assen II became the Bulgarian Tzar.

The Second Bulgarian Kingdom reached its height during the reign of Tzar Ivan Assen II. Under his rule the state once again attained great power and became the leading country in the Balkans and the whole of South-eastern Europe. In 1230, at Klokočnitsa, in Thrace, the Bulgarian troops defeated the Byzantine army, led by Theodor Comneus of Epirus, who was taken prisoner together with his men who had survived. Ivan Assen's victory over the Byzantines won him territories from the Adriatic to the Aegean. He liberated all Bulgarian lands from foreign domination and the rule of the Byzantine feudal lords. Thus, conditions for economical and cultural advance were created. Ivan Assen II built churches, fortresses and bridges, minted his own coins, did not persecute the Bogomils and patronized trade and arts. A period of prosperity followed, which marked the zenith of medieval Bulgaria's development. During this period, in 1235, the head of the Bulgarian church received the title of patriarch.

The successors of Ivan Assen II did not manage to rule the country the way he had, and the second half of the 13th century showed signs of decline. The period of plenty was cut short by the unexpected Mongol attacks from the north, who devastated the northern part of the country. As a result of wars with Magyars and Byzantines, Bulgaria lost much territory. Besides, the incessant struggles among the feudal lords weakened the state as well. The people suffered impossibly heavy taxation and exploitation, which was unbearable burden on the peasantry. The people were oppressed and hungry, and couldn't stand it any longer. Their discontent produced a massive anti-feudal revolt in 1277. It broke out in north-east Bulgaria, and was headed by Ivailo Burdokva, a peasant and swineherd, who became the next Bulgarian Tzar. His brief rule (1277-80) was mainly devoted to fighting the Tartars, which he successfully did, showing considerable military skill. Ivailo's army of peasants drove the Tartars out of the country, then defeated Tzar Constantine Assen's troops and captured the capital of Tarnovo. The ex-tzar was killed and Ivailo was proclaimed Tzar. The success of this first anti-feudal revolt in the world caused serious anxiety in the neighbouring countries, especially in the Byzantine Empire, which sent troops against the peasant Tzar. The Tartars also resumed their attacks. Ivailo's troops drove back both of the enemies, but the wars exhausted the peasant army, and the situation of the peasants, who got nothing and obtained no relief, grew even worse. Their resistance weakened. The boyars conspired and dethroned Ivailo in 1280, when, in fact, the Assen dynasty died out.

After the failure of the uprising, the central power in Bulgaria grew weaker while the boyars gained in strength. Ivailo was replaced by the first representative of a new dynasty - the Terterids. This dynasty's only remarkable Tzar, Todor Svetoslav (1300-1321), succeeded in concluding peace with the Tartar khans, but couldn't put an end to the internal struggles and restore central authority.

Later, the feudal ruler of Vidin, Mikhail Shishman of the Shishmanid dynasty, also of Cuman origin, threatened to withdraw from the kingdom and thus managed to gain the crown in 1323.

The declining state reached its lowest point in 1330, when Tzar Mikhail Shishman was defeated and fatally wounded at the battle of

**Velbuzhd (modern Kyustendil) against Serbia.**

Tzar Ivan Alexander of Lovech, who ruled from 1331 till 1371, managed to contribute to the country's development, in particular arts. Bulgaria almost regained the prosperity and level of civilization attained during Ivan Assen II's rule, with literature, sculpture and painting, showing a harmonious combination of Bulgarian and Byzantine arts. Unfortunately, he failed to achieve political development. His two sons divided Bulgaria into two parts: Ivan Sratsimir ruled over the Vidin district, and Ivan Assen - over the Preslav district together with the Black Sea coastal cities. Dobrudzha became an independent dukedom. They were called the Vidin Kingdom, the Tarnovo Kingdom and the Dobrudzha Principality.

Bulgaria lost its Macedonian lands to the Serbian empire of Stefan Dushan, which then became the leading Balkan power. The rest of the 14th century was a period of disintegration and decline. The other Balkan states were engaged in wars and were in no better condition.

At that time, in the mid-14th century, the Ottoman empire was a strong state in Asia Minor. It started wars of aggression against the Balkan Peninsula. Bulgaria and the other states were not able to defend their independence and fell to the Ottoman forces.

The conquest can be divided into two periods: the first one, from the summer of 1370 until the summer of 1377; and the second one, from 1377 to 1397. During the first part of the first period Bulgaria was still an independent political power which rejected the proposed alliance by the Turks, but did not take an active part in the resistance against Ottoman invasion. At the end of the period the Turnovo Kingdom became a dependent state, lacking political and economic freedom due to the policy, enforced by Sultan Murad.

The second period outlines the fall of the Turnovo Kingdom. Tzar Ivan Shishman (1371-1395), who ruled over Tarnovo and Nikopol, refused to participate in the battle at Kosovo on 15.IV.1389, and that's why after the Ottoman victory they invaded, sieged and captured the capital of Tarnovo. Later, on June 3, 1395, Sultan Bayazid invaded Nikopol and killed Ivan Shishman. It is supposed that it was at that time the independent principality of Dobrudzha was also devastated.

The sole survivor for the time being was the Vidin Kingdom, ruled by Ivan Sratsimir, who declared himself a Turkish vassal. The use of new sources shows that he was captured and taken prisoner in 1397, during a campaign against Magyar. We do not know for certain what happened to the Vidin Kingdom in the following years, but it is supposed that it was finally ruined in 1422.

The destruction of the Tarnovo Kingdom and the murder of the last full-right tzar led to the destruction of Bulgaria itself, and for a period of nearly 500 years the Bulgarian state lost its political and economic independence.

## **34. Veliko Tarnovo**

Veliko Tarnovo is a major administrative and cultural centre in Northern Bulgaria, besides, it is one of the oldest and most picturesque historical settlements in our country. It is situated on hills formed along the meandering river Yantra. The average attitude of the town is 224 m, and the climate is temperate continental.

Veliko Tarnovo is also located on important road and railway junctions, connecting Sofia and Varna, and Rousse and Stara Zagora.

The terrace-like location, the numerous historical and architectural monuments, and its heroic past attract over 500 000 tourists a year. The town is the country's second most important university city after Sofia, and the centre of a developing industrial and agricultural region.

The name of Tarnovo is of Slav origin. It has been derived from the word "trun", meaning "thorn". In 1966 the town was officially given the name Veliko (Great) Tarnovo.

Situated before one of the strategic passes of the Balkan Range, leading from the Danube to Constantinople, Tarnovgrad - an impregnable fortress for its time - was the third Bulgarian capital from 1186 to 1393.

The Tarnovo region was inhabited by Thracian tribes. Later on, the Romans built a fortress on Momina Krepost hill to guard the road to Nicopolis ad Istrum. During the 5th-6th century, the Byzantine Emperor had a fortress built on Tsarevets Hill, but it couldn't resist the Slav invasions, and was finally captured in the 7th century.

The history of Tarnovgrad is, in fact, the history of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. The city witnessed the ups and downs of Bulgaria's past, its rise and fall, and the victorious clash with the Holy Roman Empire of the 4th Crusade in 1205. But the real history of the town began in 1185, when, in the church of St. Dimiter the local boyars

Assen and Peter proclaimed a rebellion against the Byzantine domination, which had interrupted the life of the Bulgarian state for 167 years. Two years later the whole of North Bulgaria was liberated. Peter ascended the throne, and Tarnovo became the capital of the state which is known to this day as the Tarnovo Kingdom.

Kaloyan, the third in line of the Assen dynasty (1197-1207), negotiated with the Pope Innocent III the recognition of the Tarnovo Kingdom by the Roman Catholic Church and for a Bulgarian church independent of Constantinople. In his correspondence with the Pope, Tzar Kaloyan claimed that he was descended from the tzars of the First Bulgarian State. He managed to regain all Bulgarian territories after defeating the army of the Latin Emperor Baldwin of Flanders, who was taken prisoner and kept in the southeastern tower until his death.

Tarnovo was the venue for a famous synod of the Bulgarian church in 1211, which tried unsuccessfully to stem the growth of a mediaeval heresy, originating from the 10th century after the name of a priest called Bogomil (beloved of God).

It was during the reign of Tzar Ivan Assen II (1218-1241) that the Second Bulgarian Kingdom reached its height. When he built the Church of the Forty Holy Martyrs, he emphasized the continuity of the First and Second Bulgarian States by building in a column inscribed by Khan Omourtag in the 9th century alongside a column bearing his own inscription. Tarnovo turned into a centre of rich economic and cultural life. The building activities also flourished - a lot of churches, public buildings and places were erected on Tsarevets and Trapesitsa Hills, as well as in the Assenova Mahala (quarters), where artisans and merchants lived. The numerous foreign traders lived in their own district, called Frankhissar, because they were all known under the name of "Franks".

Tarnovgrad also continued the tradition, created as early as the 9th-10th centuries, of making the Bulgarian capital the cultural and literary centre of the Orthodox Slavdom. For two centuries the Tarnovo Literary School developed under the patronage of enlightened rulers like Ivan Assen II, Ivan Alexander and others. Eminent men of letters worked here creating valuable manuscripts, some of which have come down to us, such as the Tetraevangelia, kept in London, and the

Chronicles of Constantine Manasses, kept in the Vatican.

In 1348-50, Theodosius of Tarnovo established in the Kilifarevo monastery The Nativity of the Virgin the first Bulgarian and Slav University, also known as Theodosius' Literary School, where prominent writers, theoreticians and hierarchs were taught.

Literature reached its highest point in the time of Patriarch Euthimius, who set up a second literary school, known as the Tarnovo School, where brilliant men like Grigori Tsamblak and Konstantine Kostenechki worked.

From 1235 until the city's conquest by the Ottomans in 1393, Tarnovo was the centre of an independent Bulgarian State church - the Tarnovo Patriarchate.

Tarnovo was also the centre of the first antifeudal peasant uprising in Europe, which lasted from 1277 to 1280.

On July 17, 1393, after a three-month siege, Tarnovo was captured by the Ottoman invaders, who managed to breach in through the Frankhissar Gate. The palaces, churches and houses were set on fire, the capital was ravaged and ruined, most of the Bulgarian aristocracy was killed, Patriarch Euthimius was sent into exile where he died. But the town did not entirely submit. During the dark centuries of Ottoman domination, from 1393 to 1877, Tarnovo was often the centre of popular uprisings and rebellions against the conquerors. The people took an active part in the first revolt, organized by knyazes Konstantin and Frouzhin in 1404, and in the campaign of Vladislav III Varnenchik in 1443-1444. The citizens rose three more times during the 16th, 17th and 18th centuries, but in vain.

During the 19th century Tarnovo flourished economically. Within the Ottoman Empire, it had the opportunity to trade with many countries, and the town became an important centre of the National Revival period. The first Bulgarian schools opened their doors, crafts and trade developed and the struggle for national liberation was resumed. A new rising was prepared. On April 12, 1835, a group of artisans and merchants, led by Velcho Atanasov-Dzhamdzhiyata (glassblower), rose in arms, but the leader was captured and hanged outside his house on the spot now marked by the Monument to Velcho's Conspiracy.

The Russo-Turkish War of 1853-1856 aroused new hopes of liberation. In 1856, Captain Dyado Nikola organized a revolt, but because of its untimely outbreak, it was soon crushed. Another uprising followed in 1862, led by Hadzhi Stavri and Nikola Kintishev, the latter was captured and hanged in Tarnovo.

Vassil Levski, the Apostle of Freedom, visited the town for the first time in 1869 and organized a secret revolutionary committee here.

In 1876, during the April Uprising, the town was again the centre of the insurgents who were later defeated at Dryanovo monastery. Their leaders Bacho Kiro, Tsanko Duystabanov, as well as many others were hanged on the outskirts of the city (now the monument of the Hanged).

On June 25, 1877 the town was liberated by the troops of the Russian general Gurko, and on February 10, 1879 the Constituent National Assembly of the Third Bulgarian State was opened in the building of the Konak.

In 1966 the development of Veliko Tarnovo as historic, cultural and tourist city began with a wide-ranging programme for study, conservation, restoration and reconstruction of the cultural and historical monuments. Today Veliko Tarnovo is economically well-developed: there is a cotton mill, a factory for transistors, radio and TV sets, a furniture plant, a leather factory, a cannery, a brewery, a vegetable oil refinery and others.

The city's modern development is closely connected with its past history. Despite the many museums here, Veliko Tarnovo is not a museum-town, but a living thriving city. Its museums and historical monuments are tied up with its present day planning. Most of the cultural, historical and architectural sights are grouped in three neighbouring city zones in almost chronological order.

THE OLDEST PART - the historical fortified hills of Tsarevets and Trapezitsa - is the first cultural-historical and museum zone, along with the mediaeval churches and monasteries situated between them.

Approaching Tsarevets along the stone causeway that was built after the original drawbridge collapsed, you can appreciate how the Assen brothers were bold enough to lead a rebellion against the impregnable citadel. The hill was well fortified with walls and towers.

The fortress had three gates. The main gate with the former drawbridge has been restored. There was another gate leading to Assenova Mahala, and another - the Frankhissar Gate.

The mediaeval town was divided into three parts: the Inner town (Tsarevets and Trapesitsa Hills), the Outer town (Assenova Mahala and Frankhissar) and the outside ramparts at the foot of Momina Krepost Hill.

The foundations of the Royal Palace have been discovered and they reveal the grandeur of the town during the Second Kingdom, when it was also called the Great City of Tarnov, the Most Royal City, the Second Rome, etc. Delicate columns divided the 32-metre long throne room into aisles, which were decorated with green serpentine, Egyptian porphyry and pink marble, and mosaics and murals depicting the rulers of three dynasties. The church of the Blessed Saviour or Patriarchate, built early in the 13th century, was the only structure permitted to surpass the palace in height. The Bulgarian Patriarchate was located on the top of the hill, occupying an area of 3 000 sq. m, and protected by walls and towers. The largest building in its centre was the church of Ascension, built on the site of an older church. It was cruciform-domed, three-aisled church with two narthexes. It is supposed to have been richly decorated with alternating stone and brick layers, glazed ceramics and arches. In 1435 the Turks erected a mosque on this site, but it was destroyed by an earthquake in 1913.

Rapidly becoming regional power, the Second Kingdom helped Byzantium overthrow the first Latin Emperor of the East, Baldwin of Flanders, who ended his days as a prisoner in the southeastern tower in 1205, thereafter known as Baldwin's Tower, restored in 1930.

The Lobna Skala (Execution Rock) is at the northeastern end of Tsarevets. It is associated with the dynasty that followed the brief reign of Ivaillo (1277-1280). The people who dared to oppose the authority were thrown into the precipice here, among whom was Patriarch Joachim the Third, accused of helping the Tartar Khan Chaka to ascend the Bulgarian throne in 1298.

To the west of Tsarevets, on both banks of the river Yantra, lies the Assenova quarter. There was a wooden bridge connecting its two parts and the hills, which was built opposite Velikata Lavra 40 Holy

Martyrs. During the Middle Ages this was the artisan quarter where crafts developed. Merchants and lower clergy also lived here. According to Grigory Tsamblak, a 14th century chronicler, there used to be a long street with numerous shops. Several medieval monuments have been preserved here. At the foot of Trapesitsa you can see the historical church of St. Dimiter, where on November, 8, 1185 the Assen brothers proclaimed the revolt against the Byzantine rule during its consecration. St. Dimiter, who, legend has it, had come from Salonika to help the oppressed Bulgarians, became the patron saint of the Second Kingdom. With its red-brick stripes and trefoil windows inlaid with orange plaques, St. Dimiter is best-looking of the surviving medieval churches, although most of the original frescoes were painted during 16th and 17th c. It was considered the Royal Church until 1230, because the first rulers of the Second Kingdom, Assen, Peter and Kaloyan, were crowned here. In 1798 it was ravaged and burned, later on it was restored and functioned until the earthquake in 1913. The preserved part of the altar apse shows the ceramic decoration.

Near the bridge is the mediaeval monastery Velikata Lavra 40 Holy Martyrs. The church seems likely to have been built in 1230 by Ivan Assen II in commemoration of his victory over the Despot of Epirus Theodor Comnenus at Klokotnitsa on the feast day of the 40 Martyrs. Historical, inscriptions, one of them retelling the epic battle near the river Klokotnitsa (The Assen's column), were cut on three of its columns. Among the columns inside, there are two which seem to have been brought from Pliska to demonstrate the continuity of the Bulgarian Kingdom, one of them being Khan Omourtag's column. Its Greek inscription reads in part: "Man dies, even though he lives nobly, and another is born. Let the latest born, when he examines these records, remember him who made them. The name of the Prince is Omourtag, the Sublime Khan." The third column bears the Greek inscription "fortress of Rodosto", obviously a fortress seized by Khan Kroum. The church is a three-nave three-apse basilica with a narthex and crypt-mausoleum. The large narthex contained 9 tombs. The church has been reconstructed many times. During the Ottoman domination it was transformed into a mosque. The present state of the structure makes it difficult to determine the original architectural type.

The narthex, built later, is comparatively well-preserved, but in 1913 it was considerably damaged by the earthquake. Its walls were covered with the famous picture calendar. These are the oldest murals by Tarnovo master painters and are now being preserved in the Historical Museum.

An extension, probably intended for the family tomb of the Assen dynasty, was built onto the western side of the church. Its walls and vaulting have been preserved in their original state. The inside of the church was divided into many bays forming two small rooms to the west. A narrow staircase leading to a belfry was built on the western wall. The preserved parts of the façade of the tomb are richly divided with blind niches, framed by glazed rosettes. The western facade is rich in decorative motifs, typical of the Tarnovo architectural school. The church and the extension were built of mixed masonry. The region around the church was a mediaeval necropolis where nobles were buried. In 1978 a tomb was discovered, in which a gold ring with an inscription "Kaloyan's ring" was found, weighing 61.1 gr. Many scholars believe that the grave belonged to Tzar Kaloyan, who fell victim to a plot in 1207.

Further north is the early 20th-century church of the Dormition. It stands on the site of the monastery of the Virgin of Prisoners, where Tzar Ivan Alexander confined his wife as a nun to marry the Jewess Sara.

The Church of SS Peter and Paul is 200 m beyond. Legends date its construction to the reign of Tzar Kaloyan (1197-1207), which was a period of negotiations with the Roman Pope Innocent III. In 1972, after the removal of later additions, four medallions were discovered depicting saints who were indisputably from 13th century murals as to the iconographs and in a style which can also be found in other Tarnovgrad works. Especially important is the fact that here, in the Holy Apostles SS Peter and Paul, the newly elected Bulgarian bishop, Ilarion Makariopolski, held the first mass in Bulgarian.

The church was also mentioned by Vladislav Gramatik in connection with the transfer of the relics of St. John of Rila from Tarnovo to the Rila monastery in 1469.

Besides the historical interest, the church is also notable for its

architecture and art. The building, which was constructed over various periods, is cruciform and has a cupola and free-standing columns. The capitals of the columns were taken from elsewhere, but their choice (two of them are of the Preslav type) indicates the collection of monuments of national significance, a policy followed by Tzar Ivan Assen II (1218-41) in the church of Forty Martyrs. Of great value are the mural paintings in the naos which belong to the earliest layer of paintings, dating from the first half of the 13th century. The images are of waist-length, but, although depicting martyrs, they are not ascetic, but alive and solid. The second layer in the naos, which is now predominant, shows the Consolation of the Virgin (on the western wall), developed with a strong feeling for ornamentation and personalized characters. The church also has the image of St. John of Rila, probably connected with the transfer of his relics.

The images and inscriptions in the gallery, painted when it was built, are inscribed in Greek and belong to the third painted layer. They are thematically related to the Tarnovo works. There are several months of the mural calendar, as in the case in the Church of the 40 Holy Martyrs.

The remarkable iconostasis with carved wooden dragons around the large Crucifixion icon was destroyed during the earthquake of 1913. Only a few icons and church plates which had been taken to other churches and museums survived.

The church was the site of massacre of 111 boyars in 1393, and only Patriarch Euthimius' intervention saved the entire population.

The church of St. George, further to the south, is smaller but in a good state of preservation. An inscription above the entrance reads that it was restored and painted in 1612. It has very well preserved murals: The Last Judgment, Abraham's Feast, etc.

**TRAPEZITSA** Overhead rises Trapezitsa Hill, where the boyars and leading clergy of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom built their houses and some 40 private churches, 16 of which are being excavated. Even today different artifacts are being discovered. In 1900 the French archaeologist Zhorzh Syor started the diggings and finds were taken to the Louvre. He discovered the foundation of 17 medieval churches. The fragments show that they were decorated with multi-

coloured mosaics, pilasters, niches and arches, and glazed ceramics. It was the second fortress within the Inner town. The name of the hill is derived from the Greek word “trape-za”, meaning “table”, because of its shape.

*Sveta Gora (Holy Hill).* It is on the south bank of the river Yantra. It used to be the centre of monastic scholastics, the oldest cultural venue, housed in the monastery which had been built here. Today, on its site you can see the beautiful buildings of SS Cyril and Methodius University.

*Momina Krepost.* The hill is situated to the east of Tsarevets. In 1946 and 1965, during the excavations, the foundation of an old fortress were discovered. It had been built to guard the important road from Nove (Svishtov) via Nikopolis ad Istrum and Haemus to Constantinople. The quarter was inhabited by serfs and craftsmen until the end of the 14th century.

The second zone lies around Gurko Street. The street itself is a living 19th-century architectural, ethnographic and arts museum. At the bottom of the street, there is a group of museums, the nearest of which is the Museum of the Urban dress and ornaments of the end of the century. It is housed in the Sarafkin’s House, which is planned in such a way that only two floors are visible from Gurko Street, but a further three overhang the river. The interior is notable for the splendid decoration of the octagonal vestibule with wrought-iron fixtures and a rosette-carved ceiling. The building also has many galleries and balconies, orchestral podium and many separate rooms. It belonged to the moneylender Dimo Sarafina and reveals the taste of the bourgeoisie in 19th-century Tarnovo.

In the immediate vicinity is the Church of SS Constantine and Helena. It was built in 1872-73 by the self-taught master builder Kolyu Ficheto, and is a work of the monumental religious architecture of the Late Revival. It is a cruciform church structure, whose single space effect is produced through the approximately equal height of covering of its different parts. This is one of the few hall churches built during the National Revival period. The rather bulky effect of the structure is due mainly to its width and extremely restrained facade decoration. The professional skill of Kolyu Ficheto is proved by the two “revision”

columns, rotating round a vertical axis, which helped the large building survive several earthquakes.

Next comes the museum of the National Revival and the Constituent Assembly. It was designed again by master Kolyu Ficheto in 1872 as the Konak of the Turkish governor, Ali Bey, who sentenced the rebels of 1876 here. The building housed the Bulgarian parliament in 1879 for two months and on April 16, the first Bulgarian Constitution was adopted, in force until Dec. 4, 1947. The session of the Grand National Assembly began and Alexander of Battenberg was selected as Bulgarian Prince. The union between the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Roumelia was also signed here in 1885. Today the museum exhibition tells about the incessant rebellions against the Turks and shows many objects and icons, including one 16th-century embroidered shroud depicting the Lamentation of Christ. The building was the last work of the master builder, whose monument stands in front of it. The museum of the second Bulgarian kingdom with its unique exhibits shows the history of the medieval town as the capital and centre of the political, economic and cultural life of Bulgaria in the 12th-14th century. However, Tarnovo and its surroundings have a culture thousand of years old, going back to Antiquity. The first room in the museum is devoted to the long historical period from the Paleolithic Age up to the foundation of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom (1185-1396). Of special interest is the treasure of gold found near the village of Hotnitsa. Finds from the digs at Nikopolis ad Istrum, a city in the centre of the province Moesia, founded by the Emperor Nero in the 1st century AD, are also noteworthy, as well as the ancient pottery found during excavations near the villages of Boutovo, Hotnitsa and Pavlikeni, dating from the 2d, 3rd and 4th centuries AD.

The second floor is devoted to the history of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom. In a small separate room Bulgarian weapons, shields, greaves and armour are exhibited together with the entire issue of medieval Bulgarian coins, minted in the 13th and 14th century. The last room is devoted to art and culture in the medieval capital when Tarnovo was the centre of intense literary and scholarly activities.

In this zone you can also see the Museum of the National and Revolutionary Resistance and the one-time Turkish gaol, where fight-

ers before and during the April Uprising of 1876 were imprisoned.

The third zone is Varousha - the old city opposite Trapesitsa hill with its narrow streets and various restored workshops, conveys the atmosphere of the 19th century. You can see craftsmen at work, visit the old cafe and pastry shop, enjoying the lack of crowds and the beauty of the wrought-iron garnished façades and cobbled slopes. The Bulgarian master Kolyu Ficheto erected here some very beautiful examples of his skill. One of them is the House with the Little Monkey at 14, Vastanicheska Street, which gets the name from the grimacing statuette under the balcony.

Another typical example of the trade and store buildings of the time is Hadzhi Nikoli Han (Inn). It was built in 1858 by the self-taught architect on a comparatively small ground space of 235 sq. m on the steep slope of Samovodska Charshia. The development of crafts made necessary the erection of accommodation places for travelling merchants. The structure is well-suited to the site, making full use of the differences in ground and street level. To the street below, there is a one-storey building housing craftsmen's shops. The short cross wings enclose a narrow courtyard and connect the one-storey portion with the three-storey building of the actual inn. The parts of the building are displayed one after another, thus stressing the effect of the originally designed main front of the inn. The three floors comprise rows of rooms for overnight guests, connected to open galleries on the two upper floors. The rows of stone columns, graded in height, rise over a high cornice made of dressed stone. These, together with the yoke-shaped line of the iron railings, underline the rhythm of the plastically divided façade. Fortunately the inn has been preserved to this day, and it is an inseparable part of the ensemble of the Revival part of the town.

### **35. Arbanasi**

Now we are nearing the village of Arbanasi - a medieval village with preserved fortified houses, the residences of some boyars of the capital city of Tarnovo who administered various provinces. It is situated only 4 km from the one-time capital on a high plateau with a view of the medieval strongholds of Tsarevets and Trapesitsa. Some scholars believe that once there was a Slav settlement here, others, considering the origin of the name, suggest that it was founded by Albanian refugees fleeing from the Turks after a failed 15th-century uprising. Its name was first mentioned in the firman of Sultan Suleiman in 1538, which presented the villages of Arbanasi and Lyaskovets to the grand vizier Rustem Pasha, the sultan's son-in-law.

Arbanasi flourished economically during the 17th and 18th century. There were large flocks of sheep, viticulture was well-developed, as well as different crafts: coppersmiths, gold- and silversmiths and braziers worked here. The local merchants did a brisk trade with Russia, Baghdad, Persia and India. They exported hides, furs, wool, dried meat, sausage and wine, and returned with silk, velvet and spices. Because of its wealth, Arbanasi was attacked several times by the Kurdzhalii, then a plague epidemic followed, and particularly after the Crimean War of 1853-1856, the village was abandoned by most of its inhabitants and soon declined. But before long other people settled down here. The eventful history of the village has affected its houses which look like small fortresses. Arbanasi's merchants invested their wealth in these impregnable stone houses, but they also donated to churches, chapels and public drinking fountains.

Arbanasi's houses are unlike those in any other part of Bulgaria. Some experts consider them to be direct descendants of the boyars' houses, while others see an outside influence which came to these lands with the migration of other peoples during the 16th century. But

on the other hand, similar houses are nowhere to be found on the Balkan Peninsula, so it may be inferred that they are the result of the local architectural development.

The remaining old houses in Arbanasi may fall into three main groups. The first and the oldest group is represented by the house of Hadzhi Pop Panayot and that of chorbadzhi Georgi. They are large, fortress-like stone buildings with interior staircases, which have strong stone sentry-boxes on the inside and niches for the night watchman. Their roofs have wide eaves, the windows are small and have iron bars, and the rooms are in semi-darkness.

The second type of solid thick masonry on the ground floor and has a whitewashed first floor. There aren't any balconies yet. An example of this is the house of Stefan Lichev.

The third and latest type, typical of the 18th century, has an open balcony without windows. The iron bars are replaced by wooden shutters.

Time has spared us only 144 architectural monuments, the most interesting of which are the Konstantsaliev and Hadzhi Iliev's houses, which have been turned into museums.

The house of Konstantsaliev was built in the 18th century and is the largest and most lavishly decorated house in the village. From the outside it is surrounded by massive stone walls, but inside the two-storey structure is surprisingly well laid out. The ground floor is built of stone. It was used for storage, servants' lodgings and hiding place. The upper floor, which contains comfortable rooms decorated with wood-carvings, is made of wood.

Just across from the Konstantsaliev's House is the 18th-century Kokonska fountain. On its front there is an Arabic inscription which reads: "Whoever looks at it and drinks from it shall be blessed with a light in the eyes and soul."

The other house, The Hadzhi Iliev's, is situated between the two old churches of St. Dimiter and St. Atanas. It is as beautiful and magnificent as the house of Konstantsaliev. In 1908 it was presented to Tzar Ferdinand.

The houses in Arbanasi have much in common. They are usually built inside the yard, away from the streets, and are protected by

stone walls, some to four meters high. The spacious courtyard is entered either through a large double nail-studded gate framed with stone columns and covered with a four-sided roof, or through a small gate. The inner walls between the houses have small openings for communicating with the neighbours and for escaping in emergencies. The Arbanasi houses have almost the same floor plans, but they differ widely in their interior decoration. There are geometrical and floral figures on the columns, doors and shutters, and they aren't alike. The favourite ornamental elements are the stylized wood carved suns on the panelled ceilings and ornate plaster cornices bearing also floral or geometric motifs.

Another part of Arbanasi's architectural and historic wealth are the 5 churches and 2 monasteries.

The most beautifully decorated church is the Church of the Nativity, built during the 15th century. Later, in the 17th century, it was renovated and repainted. Externally it is rather plain, but there are richly coloured frescoes inside, dating from the 17th century. The number of the images and compositions painted on the walls is great. They illustrate texts from the Old and New Testaments. David's Psalms and hymns in praise of the Virgin Mary. On the north wall is the genealogy of Christ. Greek influence is shown in the gallery on the frieze of Greek philosophers, including Homer. The iconostasis contains notable scenes of the Creation and the Fall, and is made by Popovich of Elena in 1821. Both the main body of the church and the chapel of St. John the Baptist have separate areas for men and women to pray, and at the end of the services it was customary for the local nobles to donate alms in the wide corridor behind the portico. The church with its paintings were a collective necessity of the time. In 1632 the chapel was inscribed with the words: "The labour and benefaction of the most esteemed notable master Stoiko". In 1638 in the gallery of the church appeared another inscription: "This church was painted with the aid, labour and benefaction of the most esteemed and highly noble notable Stati and his wife Teodora." In the years to come many more donors left their names in the naos.

The church of the Archangels Michael and Gabriel is located on high ground above Arbanasi's main square. It is thought to date back

to the beginning of the 17th century (around 1600). It is one of the more elaborate versions of the general Arbanasi type of church. The solid brick structure has an elongated body consisting of a single-aisle naos with 3 conchs, a vast long narthex to the west, a side narthex to the north and a chapel connected to the narthex. The walls, ceilings and the dome are covered with paintings dating from the late 17th and early 18th century, most of which are the work of the local schoolmaster Hristo, including the panoramic Nativity scene in the apse. Other masters from Salonika and Bucharest also contributed to its beauty.

The church is built of dressed stone with white mortar and its outer appearance does not suggest the interior beauty and richness. The iconostasis, made in 1813 by master-carvers from the Tryavna school, has also been preserved to this day.

Each church in Arbanasi has an eastern section for men and a western section for women; the narthex and the side galleries are richly decorated with frescoes from the Bible and the lives of saints and donors.

One of the monasteries in Arbanasi is the monastery of St. Nikola. Situated at the south-western end of the village, it was part of the wide-spread religious construction during the reign of the Assen dynasty. It is a perfect combination of the medieval construction and beauty of the Revival architecture. The monastery was destroyed in 1393 and 300 years later, in 1680, it was restored. The present-day monastery church dates from that time as well. High walls surround the outer and inner courtyards. The building was rebuilt in 1735 by the “boyar” Atanasii, who was killed five years later as a revolutionary against the Sultan. The monastery was devastated by a plague in 1744, burned by the Kurdzhalii in 1798, and reconstructed for the last time in 1833 under the directions of Father Zotic Preobrazhenski. Many Bulgarian fighters for freedom found shelter here.

The plan of the monastery church is typical of Arbanasi church buildings: it is long and narrow with a two-sided roof with a cupola. It also contains men's and women's sections and a small chapel of St. Iliya, consecrated in 1716, with richly coloured scenes from the life of Christ. The cupola itself was added in the 1880s and is something new and not typical. During this addition the historical murals from 1705

and 1787 were whitewashed. The frescoes, which have been partially preserved, are in the women's section; they are depicted with shortened proportions and in two dimensions with contrasting colours. Some valuable icons have been preserved, including those of the patron saints Nikola and Iliya. The iconostasis is a late Russian 19th century type. The monastery had much gold and silver, which was continuation of the traditions of the Tarnovo goldsmiths.

The other one is the Monastery of the Holy Virgin at the north-western end of the town. We do not know how it survived the Turkish raids in 1393, but we do know that it had much wealth in the 17th century, when it was destroyed. The monastery was restored in 1680 with the donations of the local people. The monastery church is a product of many destructions and rebuildings. The chapel of the Holy Trinity has preserved some murals from the 17th century, as well as icons made by masters of Tryavna school during the 17th and 18th century and the beginning of the 19th century.

## **36. The Stara Planina Mountains**

The Stara Planina Mountains are the third highest, but the longest mountain range in Bulgaria, stretching from the River Timok to the west to Cape Emine to the east. The range divides the country into two roughly equal parts: Northern and Southern Bulgaria.

The mountains have had a number of names - Haemus, Matorni Gori, Balkan. After the Turks had invaded the peninsula, they called the range "Balkan", meaning "a wooded mountain range". This name was later adopted by the geographical literature of the West and the whole peninsula became known as the Balkan Peninsula. The Bulgarians called the range Stara Planina, which means "old mountains". To the south the mountainside slopes steeply and quite impressively to the valleys, whereas the northern flanks slope down more gently.

The Balkan Mountains are divided into three sections: the Western, Central and Eastern Balkan. The Western and Central sections are the highest, with a number of peaks over 2 000 m high. The highest one, Mount Botev, is in the Central part and rises to 7 840 ft (2 376 m).

Along the whole length of the range it is cut across by a lot of passes, rivers and saddles. This accounts for the naming of the parts of the mountains as separate mountains: Berkovska Mountain, Troyanska Mountain, etc.

The Western section begins at Mount Zhrebche, south of the Belogradchick Pass and stretches as far as the Zlatitsa Pass. The ridge of this section, although very high at places, is, on the whole, rounded. Beech woods are characteristic of this section. A number of rivers rise here. The Iskar cuts through the mountain, forming the picturesque Iskar gorge.

The Central part stretches eastwards to the Vratnik Pass. This is

by far the most beautiful part of the range. The rivers, rising in this section, are the Vit, the Ossum, the Yantra, the Toundzha and some others.

The Eastern section stretches from the Vratnick Pass to Cape Emine on the Black Sea coast. The largest Bulgarian river flowing into the Black Sea takes rise among its hills - the Kamchia.

The main range is between the Pre-Balkan - densely wooded heights to the north, and the Sub-Balkan valleys to the south, nestling at the foot of the high-rising mountains. It is a natural climatic barrier which prevents the cold winds from the north from penetrating South Bulgaria, thus making its climate milder. The range is rich in deciduous forests, mainly of oak and beech. Natural coniferous groves are rare, but not unlikely to come across. The mountains are the habitat of deer, hares, bears, wild goats, etc. They contain deposits of coal, iron and copper. There are also a number of quarries, producing marble, limestone and sandstone.

Although the range is not very high and famous for purpose-built skiing resorts as the Rila and the Pirin, its scenery is remarkably beautiful and it is a perfect hiking territory. There are a number of nature reserves like Boatin, Tsarichina, Steneto, declared such both for their scenic attractions and to preserve their flora and fauna.

The mountains have been inhabited since ancient times. Thracians, Slavs and Bulgarians took refuge in their densely wooded hills when threatened by enemies. The mountains gave shelter to the Bulgarian "haidouti" - those brave men and women who took up arms against the oppressors during the Ottoman rule. The Russian troops and the Bulgarian volunteers defended their passes and peaks during the Russo-Turkish War in 1877-78.

If you choose a route along the northern flanks of the range, your journey from Bourgas heading west may include a visit to the Blue Rocks near Sliven - a spot of breathtaking mountain scenery. Travelling north via the famous Shipka Pass, connected with the glorious battles during the Russo-Turkish War, you will get to Gabrovo and a visit to Etura - an ethnographic reserve near it, is a must. Further north is Tarnovo - once a medieval walled city and capital of Bulgaria (1185-1393). It has a magnificent setting - perched high among the steep cliffs of the Yantra gorge. Lovech and Troyan as well as the

Troyan Monastery are also worth visiting.

If you drive westwards to Sofia via the sub-Balkan valleys you can't help feeling fascinated by the beauty of the scenery along the somewhat narrow and winding road. A number of small towns like Kalofer, Karlovo, Sopot, connected with the struggles of the Bulgarians against the Ottoman oppressors that have preserved the charm of the Bulgarian National Revival architecture, are picturesquely situated along the road. You will drive through the famous Valley of Roses, lying snug beneath the southern shoulders of the Balkan. It produces 70% of the world's rose oil and Kazanlak - in the very heart of the region, has been proclaimed to be the "capital of the rose" with its rose museum and research garden. A Thracian tomb with unique wall paintings has been miraculously preserved in Kazanlak, although it has been robbed of its valuable objects. The tomb is closed to avoid damage to the precious paintings, but an exact replica of it, built next to the tomb, is open to visitors.

The Valley of Roses was also an important area during the uprising against the Turks in April 1876, which led to the Russo-Turkish War and Bulgaria's independence.

## **37. Medieval Arts and Architecture**

The development of arts and architecture in the early Middle Ages bears the features of the arts of Proto-Bulgarians and Slavs. The first works showed a certain grimness and austerity but later their line and spirit mellowed under the influence of the great neighbouring civilizations, particularly that of Byzantium.

One of the earlier monuments is the colossal rock relief at Madara. The fortifications and palaces at Pliska and Preslav, built of brilliantly white stone blocks, puzzle archaeologists to this day. The adoption of Christianity in the middle of the 9th century initiated intensive construction of churches and monasteries. Especially remarkable were the Large Basilica at Pliska because of its great dimensions, and the Round Church at Preslav because of its architectural design. Pottery developed particularly intensively because all public buildings as well as palaces were decorated with glazed ceramic plaques and mosaics. The mosaic icon of St. Theodore (found at Patleina, near Preslav) is a masterpiece of art.

Bulgarian literature began with the creation of the Old Bulgarian (Slavonic) alphabet by Cyril and Methodius in the 9th century. Their disciples Naum and Clement arrived in Bulgaria and established a literary school. The adoption of the Slavonic script made possible a great flowering of culture, written in a language accessible to all. Many of the authors of the day expressed in their writings their delight in the new alphabet. The broad activities of the newly established literary centres in Preslav and Ohrid were mainly due to the direct guidance of prince Boris, and later of his son Simeon. The reign of Simeon (893-927) is known as "The Golden Age of Bulgarian Literature". It was one of the spiritual peaks reached by Medieval Bulgaria through the works of such talented writers as Clement of Ohrid, Constantine of Preslav, Chernorizets Hrabur, John the Exarch and others. A new phe-

nomenon - the book - was introduced in the educated circles of Bulgarian society. The first work which made an impression was "Of Letters" by Chernorizets Hrabur. "Hexameron" by John the Exarch and the poems of Bishop Constantine of Preslav, although religious in character, represent an original chronicle of the period. The educated Bulgarian was also made acquainted with the concepts of famous ancient scholars and philosophers thanks to the considerable number of works translated from Greek. Of some interest are also the numerous clandestine writings (apocryphas), especially those of the Bogomils.

The remarkable spiritual upsurge during the late 9th and early 10th centuries did not remain a phenomenon confined to the territory of the Bulgarian state only. In the course of years it acquired much wider scope. It is an acknowledged fact that practically everything created during that period as original works or as translations, came, in one way or another, from within the borders of Bulgaria, to penetrate into other Slav countries and to be made available to them. Thus Bulgaria became a centre of Slav culture, which subsequently spread over the entire Orthodox Slav world. Bulgarian cultural influence was felt earliest in Russia. It was from Bulgaria that the Russians obtained their alphabet and church books. The Old Bulgarian language remained the literary language of Russia until the 18th century.

The 13th and 14th centuries, and in particular the reign of Ivan Alexander (1331-1371), were another prolific period of Bulgarian medieval culture. The construction of castles for defense purposes increased considerably. Mention should be made of the following castles: Tsarevets in the then capital Tarnovo, the Hrelyu Tower in the Rila Monastery, Baba Vida in the town of Vidin and Assen's Fortress in the vicinity of the town of Assenovgrad, all of which have remained almost intact until today. A great number of churches, rather small in size, were built at that time. They had many-coloured decoration achieved by stone and brick masonry, glazed ceramic plaques and murals (several churches at Nessebar and Assenova Mahala in Tarnovo, also the Church of St. Trinity at Bachkovo Monastery and the church at Zemen Monastery). One of the most important monuments of the period is the Church of Boyana, near Sofia, decorated with unique frescoes executed in 1259.

In the 13th century when Byzantium declined because of political crises and foreign invasions, the Tarnovo school of painting reached its peak in creating new techniques, new approach to religious scenes and realistic portrait painting. Manuscript illumination also flourished. The best achievements were the “Gospels of Tzar Ivan Alexander” (The British Museum) and Tomich’s “Psalter” (The Moscow Historical Museum) from the 14th century. Crafts, such as icon-painting, wood-carving, gold and silver work flourished as well. This was also a prolific period for Bulgarian literature. Theodosius founded a literary school at Tarnovo, which trained a number of Bulgarian and Slav scholars. The best known were Patriarch Euthymius, Gregory Tsamblak and Constantine Kostenechki. They produced religious and secular works dealing with the problems of the day.

The Ottoman conquest put a stop to the cultural development in Bulgaria but fortunately the medieval spiritual and artistic values did not die out altogether. Memories of the country's great past and cultural achievements were kept alive in the monasteries in a wait for more favourable circumstances.

## **38. Icons and Icon-painting in Bulgaria**

An icon is a painting depicting the image of Christ, the Holy Virgin, the saints or any other religious theme and is particularly worshipped in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Unlike the murals, the icon does not fulfill decorative functions only. Neither is it illustrative by nature. It is created as an evidence of God's omnipotence and plays an important role in religious worship as a means of communication between people and God.

Little is known about its origin but during the years of Iconoclastic Controversy, one of the chief arguments in favour of sacred images (or icons) was the claim that Christ Himself had permitted St. Luke to paint his portrait, and that other portraits of Christ and the Virgin had miraculously appeared on earth by divine fiat. These original "true" sacred images were supposedly the source for the later, man-made ones.

The Iconoclastic Controversy, which began with an imperial edict of 726 prohibiting religious images, raged for more than a hundred years. It divided the population into two hostile groups. The image destroyers (Iconoclasts) led by the emperor and supported mainly in the eastern provinces of the realm, insisted on a literal interpretation of the biblical ban against idolatry and wanted to restrict religious art to abstract symbols and plant and animal forms. Their opponents, the Iconophiles, were led by the monks and centred in the western provinces, where the imperial edict remained ineffective for the most part. The roots of the conflict went very deep: on the plane of theology they involved the basic issue of the relationship of the human and the divine in the person of Christ; socially and politically they reflected the struggle between State and Church. The Controversy also marked the final break between Catholicism and the Orthodox faith. After the victory of the Iconophiles in 843 there was a rapid recovery in the production of icons.

Bulgaria was the first Slav country to adopt Christianity (865). Along with missionaries from Constantinople the Bulgarian rulers of that time welcomed icon-painters, too. They were assigned to decorate the newly built churches. Ever since that time the Bulgarian icon-painting has been linked with the principles of Byzantine aesthetics, with the general development of the East Orthodox art and the cultural history of Europe as a whole.

Because of the veneration in which they were held, icons had to conform to strict formal rules, with fixed patterns repeated over and over again. Created for the ritual of a cult, the icon, with its symbolic character, had to inspire the viewer with the supremacy of the spiritual over the material. The composition, the colour scheme and especially the features of the face with its huge eyes all led to this dramatic effect.

The oldest Bulgarian icons were made of ceramics and originated in the 9th century in the monasteries around the first Bulgarian capitals of Pliska and Preslav. Archaeological excavations unearthed numerous workshops and ovens for glazed ceramic tiles in the area. The production of icons spread on to workshops around the Golden Church of Tzar Simeon to reach its peak in the works of the monastic icon-painters from Patleina and the Royal Monastery near Preslav. Small icons, rectangular in shape and depicting archangels in full length from Patleina; round medallions from the Golden Church; square icons showing apostles and evangelists found in Touzlaluka and the icons found in the Royal Monastery, depicting the elongated top halves of figures - all these point to the fact that ceramic icons played an important part in the architectural finish of palaces and churches and represented one of the peaks of Preslav civilization. Tiles, inscribed with Cyrillic texts found around the Church of Simeon prove the Bulgarian origin of the artists. Bulgarian painted ceramic icons stood up in all respects to the other techniques (applied sculpture, glass mosaics, goldwork) of Old Bulgarian art in the 9th and 10th centuries.

The best preserved ceramic icon in Bulgaria is that of St. Theodore Stratilates which dates back to the 9th-10th century and is particularly famous and impressive for its size and artistic value. It is composed of more than 20 glazed ceramic tiles. The monumental

image of the saint who bears the expression of ascetic contemplation is one of the main assets of the icon. It provides interesting data on the characteristic features of early Bulgarian icon-painting and the trends along which it developed after Bulgaria adopted Christianity.

The First Bulgarian State enriched the artistic achievements of Orthodox culture through the production of glazed ceramic icons. The basic features of East Orthodox Art were established immediately after the iconoclastic period - stylized line, monumental image and distinct shape.

During the next centuries the proximity to Byzantium, which was the leading cultural power in Europe, influenced to a certain extent Bulgarian medieval painting. Bulgarian saints, however, were introduced into icons. After the relics of the Bulgarian Saint John of Rila and Saint Petka of Tarnovo had been carried to the newly consecrated capital of the Second Bulgarian State - Tarnovo, the canonical stereotype of their images appeared on Bulgarian icons and then was used by icon-painters from other Orthodox lands. The image of St. John of Rila was frequently found after the 15th century in the southeastern parts of the Balkans, further to Croatia, Moldavia and distant Russia.

Bulgarian icons were usually painted on a flat limetree or cypress board covered with a layer of glue and plaster, on top of which there was sometimes a piece of cloth soaked in alabaster. The icon-painters used natural colour powders dissolved in water and egg yolk and then fixed them with a protecting polish containing linseed and tar. Some of the icons were partially covered with a layer of metal thus making the image of the saint more conspicuous.

Constantinople was conquered by the crusaders in 1204 and Tarnovo became the main cultural centre of Orthodoxy on the Balkans. The new capital took over the role of the old centres of icon-painting. Religious art was interpreted in the light of Hesychasm which was the leading elite philosophy at the time. Fine icons from that time have survived, remarkable for their clean-cut, restrained and solemn composition. It is difficult to pick an example from the large number of masterpieces, but one we must mention is the icon of St. John of Rila from the Rila Monastery (14th century), executed with a surprising ease by the unknown master. The image of the Bulgarian hermit

expresses deep self-preoccupation, self-awareness and nobleness and attests to the dominating influence of Hesychasm on art at that time.

There are icons of dynastic origin related to the Tarnovo school - best among them being The Virgin Hodegetria in a silver casing presented to Nessebar by the uncle of Tzar Ivan Alexander in 1342 (National History Museum) and the double-sided icon The Vision of Prophet Ezekiel and John the Theologian (1395) presented to the Poganovo Monastery by the grand-daughter of Tzar Ivan Alexander (National Art Gallery, Sofia). This famous icon is particularly interesting with the shapely monumental figures of The Virgin and St. John the Theologian on one of its sides. The two are engrossed in a dialogue whose message is not quite apparent. The Virgin seems to grieve for her father with dignity and restraint - expressed not only in the fresh complexion of her face but also in the gentle grace of her body.

The famous double-sided icon of Christ Pantocrator and The Virgin Eleusa from Nessebar can also be referred to the representative Orthodox art of the 14th century. Although the theme of motherhood was one of the principal ones in the Byzantine art, the Virgin Eleusa scene was rarely used by Byzantine masters. It was, however, widespread in Slavonic countries. The Nessebar icon appears as an original local variant of the Eleusa type, not only because of its iconographic features - the Virgin holding the Child Jesus in her left arm - but also because of the emotional expression of its characteristic eastern traits: large eyes, elongated nose and small mouth. The monumental impression, the distinct outline and exquisite modelling of the face with light pink cheeks are typical of the style of the 14th century.

In the first decades after the conquest of Bulgaria by the Turks (the end of the 14th c.) icon-painting developed unevenly until after the 15th century, when a new revival took place. Icons were no longer merely objects of religious worship. They became a distinctive national feature, a weapon against the conquerors' attempts to assimilate the population. In its further development icon-painting revealed a growing trend towards becoming a folk art. Typical national features of the 15th century icon are: a more powerful colour scheme, introduction of a great number of Bulgarian saints, folklore elements and details from every day life. At the time of the Ottoman rule Christian churches were

small, dug into the earth so that they might not offend the eye of the "faithful". Complied to the diminished space, icons thus gradually departed from the artistic merits of the medieval art. The lack of the former solemn monumentality was compensated for by additional ornamentation, abundance of plastic decoration and a tendency for a detailed presentation of the plot. The aim was to make this art comprehensible for the ordinary unenlightened viewers. As artistic depiction it was close to primitivism and at the same time had great emotional charge and a pronounced democratic character. These features were characteristic of Balkan art in general whereas the portrayal of biblical personages followed strictly the established Byzantine medieval iconographic rules of hierarchy, vestments, accessories and texts on the scrolls. These canons were observed without exception by Balkan artists and were handed down from master to master through iconographic handbooks. The latter described how to process the wood and lay the first coat of paint, then the gilt background and after that the outline of images by a sharp object. Body colours were laid first and then the big decorative patches. The colour depiction of images was accomplished gradually from dark to light whereas the delicate outlines and the shadows were last to be painted.

The lack of the imposing presence of high Constantinople style made it possible for Ohrid, Thessaloniki and Sofia to turn into local cultural centres maintaining the classical traditions of Christian art. Mount Athos was the leading centre among them. Those areas in Bulgaria linked by the sea with other Christian Mediterranean countries developed a stylistic trend in icon-painting typical of the Italo-Cretan school. Examples of the latter type were found in the southern Bulgarian lands - The Virgin Hodegetria of the 15th century from Nessebar, St. George Enthroned of the 16th century from Plovdiv, etc.

The well-known icon of the Patron Saint at the Old Testament Trinity Monastery in Etropole by icon-painter Nedyalko from Lovech, 1598, is considered to be a programme work of the Bulgarian icon-painting because it is influenced by the tradition of the classical Middle Ages and the penetration of the new Renaissance world outlook. The general impression of the icon and the profound philosophical nuance

are enhanced by the manner in which the images of angels are depicted. Faces are calm, with a universal beauty, the composition is symmetrical and magnificently arranged, the line is superb and the colours - clear with the prevalence of gold and red, the gold virtually streaming from the background. The signature of icon-painter Nedyalko however was a fact without precedence in the strictly regulated art where anonymity of the artist was a must.

During the 17th century centres of icon-painting emerged in Nessebar, Lovech, Bachkovo, Plovdiv and elsewhere. "Christ the Almighty" from the Kremikovski Monastery; "Deisis" from the Bachkovo Monastery; the magnificent "Virgin Mary" from Akhtopol and the "Madonna Odigitria" from Sozopol are among the best icons dating from that time.

A new icon-painting trend took shape in Mount Athos during the 18th century combining the old eastern traditions with the Italo-Cretan school and western influences. Inspired by Italian Baroque painters started looking for new solutions as regards space and perspective. They also started signing their works with new self-confidence and pride. The canons for beauty were changed; the pale ascetics gave way to more lively figures painted in brighter colours and greater detail. The icon turned to reality.

National schools of art were established in some prospering Bulgarian towns such as Samokov, Tryavna and Bansko. All of them are known for their individual style and generations of painters. The Samokov School of Art gave preference to less realistic figures, painted in bright colours in full grandeur, while the Tryavna and Bansko schools introduced landscape and nature.

Hristo Dimitrov, the founder of the Samokov Art School, was known to have studied painting in Vienna. His son Zakhary Zograf is the best known representative of that school. He introduced social elements into his religious scenes. The Rila Monastery features the best works of icon-painters from this school. Zakhary Zograf painted a series of portraits of donors while his brother's works include images of saints.

The Tryavna School (Vitanovs and Zakharievs) initially maintained the old Byzantine traditions but later on their art became more

realistic. A number of double-sided icons from the Church of St. George in Belovo are painted in close perspective and in decorative style.

The Bansko School was founded by Toma Vishanov, called Molera. The art of painting was handed down in his family for four generations. Molera was the first artist who painted entirely in western manner. Features of the French 18th century painting and of Rococo can be found in the beautiful egg-shaped faces of images featured in some of his icons.

Throughout the 19th century the spirit of the National Revival, the struggle for an Independent Bulgarian Church and for national independence was reflected in icon-painting. Christ, saints and martyrs were often painted from models. Heroic scenes from Bulgarian history were also introduced in churches. Stanislav Dospevski's Christ was an image taken from this world, standing on this earth. There is nothing mystical about him, he is a man and belongs to the Earth. In his icons Dospevski (a descendant from the Samokov School, educated in Saint Petersburg) broke free from canon and revealed his personal attitude to matters more secular than religious in character.

Thousands of icons reflecting the talent of a nation were painted between the second half of the 18th and the 19th centuries. The iconographic heritage from that period is instilled with vigour and optimism.

Having passed a long course of development the Bulgarian icon is a valuable contribution to the artistic heritage of humanity and is a means of understanding the spiritual quest and sensitivity of Bulgarian people as a nation throughout its long history.

## **39. The Boyana Church**

During the Middle Ages the strong Bulgarian fortress of Boyana stood on the lower slopes of Mount Vitosha in what is now the Sofia suburb of Boyana. This name is mentioned for the first time in 969. Boyana was one of the thirty-five fortresses and settlements, which formed the fortification system of the city of Sredets. The Boyana Church was built within the fortress and is a magnificent example of medieval architecture and monumental art.

It is about 900 years old. During its existence the church has undergone many transformations, and thus its present appearance differs considerably from the original. New buildings have been added to the First (East) Church, architectural transformations have been made, the decoration has been changed. At present the Boyana Church consists of three connected buildings - from the 11th, 13th and 19th centuries. Only the first two churches, built during the Middle Ages, possess significant aesthetic and architectural value.

The oldest Boyana Church, the so-called East or First Church was designed and used as a chapel. It has a typical Greek-cross plan with a dome. It is made entirely of brickwork. The volume presents an almost perfect cube. A small semicircular apse protrudes from the east wall. The north and south façades are articulated on the outside with three blind arches each with the central arch higher than the side ones. The Church has a hipped roof with the solid drum of the dome rising from the walls without any sort of transition.

The floor is covered with bricks. Many fragments, which probably belonged to the original stone iconostasis, have been found in the vicinity. The East Church was scantily lit by long narrow openings - one each on the north and south walls, four on the dome and one on the apse.

The entire interior surface of the walls and dome was covered with murals. Some larger fragments have been preserved in the apse.

As the first church was painted again in the middle of the 18th century, traces of the original paintings are noticeable only where the upper layer of murals has been destroyed.

The little preserved is not sufficient for the restoration of the whole composition, but we can infer something of their style and technique of execution. The murals were monumentally executed in al fresco. They conveyed a light and gentle watercolour effect. The technique is instrumental for defining the time of construction and decoration of the First Church. Some scholars date it to the 10th century and others to the 11th century.

In the 13th century the feudal ruler of the western region of the Second Bulgarian State, Sebastocrator Kaloyan, and his wife Desislava, who were closely related to the royal family, commissioned the extension of the church. The builders added a new two-storey building to the western wall of the First Church. The ground floor has direct access from the First Church and was intended as a narthex. It is rectangular, covered with a cylindrical vault. The upstairs floor of Kaloyan's Church has an almost identical architectural composition to the older building - in the shape of a Greek cross. The upper floor was used as a family chapel. It was dedicated to the martyr healer St. Panteleimon. Access to the chapel is by an outside staircase along the southern wall. Stairs connected the chapel with the house of the nobleman. There are grounds for believing that in the event of danger the mobile staircase was removed. Thus the staircase chapel could also serve as a defence tower.

The tasks facing the builder of Kaloyan's Church, dedicated to St. Nicholas, were very complex. First, he had to preserve the East Church; second, he had to build a new church, which had to be connected with the ground floor of the existing church; and third, he had to erect a second floor to house the family chapel. The builder managed all these tasks brilliantly.

The builder made some alterations in the old church but adhered to its existing building technology. The first floor of the new church is made of mixed brickwork and masonry. The second floor is entirely of brickwork. The northern and southern façades have four blind arches each on the level of the second floor. The eastern façade of Kaloyan's

Church rises above the roof of the First Church. On the outside its surface is broken by a small semicircular apse.

A solid dome stood above the roof supported on the square under the dome. This dome was destroyed (probably in one of the many earthquakes in the area during the 17th century).

Apparently after that the upper floor remained deserted for a long time without any attempt at repairing it. It remained in this state up to the 19th century when the Boyana Church was finally rebuilt and a very primitive building was added. It is a great pity that the builder of this extension did not manage to further develop the existing architectural composition; instead, he clumsily spoiled the overall impact. The extension and its decoration have no artistic value. The original entrance to the upper church was blocked. The destroyed solid dome of the family chapel was replaced by a new timber tent-like dome similar to the present one. Today the two medieval churches are plastered on the outside. Thus all decorative elements on the façades have been hidden. Until several years ago the medieval architecture of the Boyana Church could not be seen; now the restoration works are gradually revealing the original appearance of the building.

For the foundations of Kaloyan's Church the builder used huge stones, some of which were carefully hewn. He also used fragments of antique buildings - parts of columns, cornices and so on. Their considerable dimensions and elaborate decoration give grounds for believing that they had belonged to some of the monumental buildings in the ancient city of Serdica.

The attitude of the builder to tradition is very significant. His respect for the existing church, which he preserved and included in the composition is only an element of his professional respect for his predecessors. Apparently the donor of the church himself, the Sebastocrator Kaloyan, the ruler of the region, had a similar attitude to continuity. He was related to Tzar Constantine Assen Tikh and it was during his reign when the church was built. The portraits of the royal couple in the Boyana Church emphasize the relation of the family of the Sebastocrator to the court in the capital of the Second Bulgarian State, Tarnovo.

Sebastocrator Kaloyan invited artists for the painting of the

Church. The murals in the St. Panteleimon Chapel on the second floor are severely damaged. Only small fragments are preserved but they are enough to show that the murals in both churches were painted at the same time by the same painters. The arrangement of the scenes follow the Byzantine iconographic models established in the 11th century. The monumental image of Christ the Almighty is painted on the dome of the downstairs church. In the niches along the north, south and west walls are the most important episodes of Christ's life. The frieze encircling the most visible part of the interior of the church - immediately above eye level, contains the life-size figures of saints, patrons of the Sebastocrator's family. They are of a specific Bulgarian variety and are to be found in the family chapels from the same period on Trapezitsa Hill in the capital city of Tarnovo. The choice of saints as well as the way of artistic execution point to the fact that the painters, though unknown, belonged to the Tarnovo School of Arts. The school was established after Bulgaria's liberation from Byzantine domination in 1185 and flourished in the 13th and 14th centuries. The political and economic power of Bulgaria at that time promoted an intensive building of castles and churches which, in turn, resulted in the development of arts. The Tarnovo School adopted some characteristic features of the art of Constantinople and was able to develop them still further. In the 12th and 13th centuries Byzantium suffered a political and economic crisis. A large part of its territory and Constantinople, its capital, were seized by the Crusaders, as a result it fell to the isolated empire of Nicea to uphold the traditions of Byzantine art which were now channelled mainly into book illuminations and mosaics. At the same time Tarnovo school developed new techniques of wall painting. Its portrait painting achieved a depth of human expression unknown in Byzantine art. The best specimens of the Tarnovo School of Art with their realism anticipated the works of Giotto, which heralded the beginning of the Italian Renaissance. The frescoes of the Boyana Church are among the finest achievements of 13th century European art. As well as biblical themes, the artists drew on contemporary life for inspiration: clothing the saints in medieval Bulgarian dress and setting garlic, radishes and bread - the peasants' staples - on the table in the Last Supper.

Perhaps the finest portraits are those of Boyana's patrons,

Desislava and Sebastocrator Kaloyan, depicted holding the church in the customary fashion, and the haloed figures of the king and queen, Assen and Irina. The king (tsar) Constantine-Assen is depicted in the prime of life. He is broad-shouldered and his face is slightly flushed, he is evidently a man who enjoys life. The queen (tsarina) was the daughter of the Byzantine Emperor Theodore II Lascaria and granddaughter of the Bulgarian Tzar Ivan Assen II. No wonder that her face bears a haughty expression. The richly decorated royal garments are depicted with precision. Both figures are life-size.

The other distinguished couple, Sebastocrator Kaloyan and Desislava, his wife, are also depicted life-size. Kaloyan, the donor of the church, is portrayed as a serious and thoughtful person. The face of Desislava is delicate and affable. Her lips are wreathed in a faint smile.

Jesus Christ and the Virgin are not depicted schematically despite the religious message they inevitably conveyed. Their intelligent eyes stand out against the dark background. The fresco of "The Blessing Christ", for example, portrays a young man, much experienced and forgiving. The interpretation is in complete contrast to Byzantine icon-painting which presented the "Blessing Christ" as a powerful emperor.

Of the other frescoes mention should also be made of "The Assumption" in which all the apostles express their sorrow differently. Most of them try to restrain their grief - again a true to life scene, very different from the Byzantine canon, in which feelings are expressed by stylized gestures.

"The Crucifixion" shows a fine scene of proportion, Christ's body hangs tragically from the cross on the dark background. The Virgin bears her sorrow with dignity and restraint. St. John makes a gesture of despair.

"The Descent into Hell" often replaces the scenes of "The Resurrection" in Orthodox painting. Christ takes Adam and Eve out of Hell. On the right are the ancient kings, on the left, young sinners. Abel, a good-looking young man, is among them. The broken door of Hell is depicted in great detail. "Christ and the Doctors" is a remarkable composition. The 12 year old Christ is shown as a handsome, healthy boy with an intelligent expression. "The Pharisees" are excit-

ed; they are in the middle of a discussion. This fresco can be seen in the southern niche of the narthex while in the northern niche is "The Presentation of Mary, Mother of God, in the Temple". The latter is painted over a second layer of plaster. There is reason to believe that the original painting from 1259 is still preserved underneath. The composition of the earlier fresco is of a high artistic quality but it is executed in a different style, colour range and technique.

The eighteen scenes of "The Life and Miracles of St. Nicholas", patron saint of the 13th century church, arranged along the vault in the narthex are partly damaged. They show some Byzantine influence and direct contacts with Constantinople but on the whole the interpretation is typical of the Tarnovo school. The analysis of the styles and techniques used for the execution of the murals suggest two painters, each with his own individuality. It should be emphasized, however, that the artists succeeded in producing an integral composition. One of them was the innovator, the experienced artist and his work (most of the frescoes in the Boyana Church) possess the new trends of the 13th century. The other one was more decorative, his style more archaic and he was responsible for the images of St. Panteleimon in the upper church, the saints Barbara and Nedelya in the ground church and some of the images in the scene from the life of St. Nicholas.

The Bulgarian people, however, have a well-established idea that the Boyana wall-paintings were the work of a single artist, whom they call the Boyana Master. This already legendary name has rightfully been adopted by scientists and connoisseurs of art and stands for all the humanistic tendencies and expressiveness in the Boyana murals, which make the Boyana Church one of the best achievements of human art.

## **40. Rila Monastery**

Background to the magnificent building is provided by the peaks of the Rila Mountains. The monastery itself is situated at 1200 m above sea level, and the scenery around is unexpectedly various: dense woods, steep folded slopes, crystal clear waters of the rivers and lakes. Once hard to reach, nowadays you can easily get to it along the road flanked by high beech-trees. The woods around are inhabited by bears, the biggest animal species here.

The history of the monastery reflects the entire history of the Bulgarian state and people, the defence of their spiritual and cultural nature. The monastery was founded in the first half of the 10th century, when Bulgaria ranked among the first states in Europe with its material and spiritual culture, by John of Rila and his followers. We are not sure what the monastery looked like at that time. It is only known that it was originally built as a colony for hermits in the place of the White Cells, a locality close to the cave the saint occupied, some 3 km to the east of the present-day monastery buildings. The ruins can still be seen there. According to legend, there lived 66 monks, but there is lack of information about the monastery and its activities concerning the period after Saint John's death up to the 14th century. It declined during the 11th century, but with the foundation of the Second Bulgarian State in 1187 great care was taken of it. The vicissitudes of time forced its location to be changed on several occasions.

Unquestionable written and material evidence date back from the 14th century. A big church-donor of the same century was the famous local boyar, protosebast Stefan Dragovol-Hrelyo, who settled in the monastery as an independent ruler. About the year 1335 he raised several new buildings - residential wings, a fortified five-storey (23 m) defence tower, topped by the Transfiguration Chapel - a cruciform dome church, built in 1349. What has come down to us is the

tower, the gates and the bishop's throne from the church - wonderful pieces of the Bulgarian woodcarving art of the Middle Ages.

Rila Monastery was always under the patronage of the Tzars of the First and Second Bulgarian Kingdom. A charter of Tzar Ivan Shishman of 1378, preserved in the monastery library, says that similar charters were also granted by Tzar Ivan Assen II and Kaliman, both of whom reigned in the 13th century, as well as other Bulgarian rulers. The monastery was donated real estate - land, many villages in different districts and properties. Thus, by the end of the 14th century, the monastery had become a powerful feudal entity.

The monastery's indisputable authority influenced the Turkish sultans Bayazid I and Mohamed, and, during the first years of the Ottoman domination, in the 15th century, they were tolerant towards the Christian church and confirmed the rights and privileges granted by the Bulgarian tzars by special firmans. Despite that, around the mid-15th century, the monastery was devastated by Turkish hordes and abandoned.

The Rila Monastery was raised out of the ruins at the time of sultan Mohamed II, who gave certain rights to the Christians in his vast empire, and was brought back to life not earlier than the second half of the 15th century by the efforts of 3 brothers from Kyustendil region - David, Iosaf and Theophan, sons of the Kouprik Bishop, Yakov.

A new centre was needed for the cultural life, which had declined or transferred abroad. Despite the fact that all hopes of restoring the Kingdom had been lost, the Bulgarian people performed a great act with their own forces and funds: they restored the monastery and transported the relics of St. John of Rila back from conquered Tarnovo to the Rila Monastery in 1469. The nationwide patriotic procession passed through the whole of Bulgaria, and the fate of the monastery became the concern of the entire nation.

The first contacts with Russian monasteries were established at that time and the first agreements signed to cooperate in poor conditions. A lot of pilgrims started visiting the restored monastery, where valuable objects of the past and the relics of the great saint were kept, and where prayers and readings were in Bulgarian. The people's spiritual weapon - scholarship, literature and faith - was preserved here, and

it was not by chance that after the Tarnovo Uprising, crushed in 1686, its leader, Knyaz Rostislav Stratimirovich, who had proclaimed himself the heir of the Bulgarian tzars and had been severely wounded in the fighting, found refuge here and spent 3 years in the monastery, without the authorities in Constantinople becoming aware of this.

The Rila Monastery was burned and plundered several times. The construction of the present-day monastery buildings, which took over 30 years, started at the end of the 18th century, with means collected from the entire people. During that period the Presentation of the Virgin Church was built, and, in 1799 - St. Luke Church, near St. Luke Hermitage. The construction continued during the end of the 19th century, too. In 1805, near the St. Luke Church, the church Pokrov Bogorodichen was built as well as the drinking fountains near the Orlitsa convent and the Samokov road. Partial repairs were only allowed by the Turkish authorities, and, of course, they were rather insufficient. Nevertheless, the builders went on with their work led by the master-builder Alexi Rilets, who, in 1819, built the Doupnitsa Gate, and in the years between 1816 and 1819 erected the northern, eastern, and western residential wings. In 1833, however, a fire burst out and the monks couldn't put it out. As a result of this the whole building turned into "ashes and dust". In fact only the massive stone foundations and marble columns were not seriously damaged; some of them were replaced, others - strengthened with iron rings. The Bulgarians took the fire as a national calamity. Donations started to flow from all over the country. The reconstruction of the monastery was immediately started by the energetic and gifted Abbot Joseph, called the Builder, who raised again the north-eastern and western residential wings. There came the most eminent builders, icon-painters and wood-carvers, and only a year later the buildings were restored into their present-day appearance. And when in 1847 Milenko the Master of Blateshnitsa completed the southern wing, an impressive, looking like a strong, impregnable fortress ensemble was formed with more than 300 cells, 4 chapels, a kitchen, a refectory and a number of premises for economic activities, including mills. The projecting part of the verandah, made by master Krastyu Debraliyata, is a work of real artistic value.

Between 1834 and 1837 the prominent Bulgarian master-builder Pavel Ivanovich, creator of some of the most important churches on Mount Athos, raised a new big metropolitan church which was decorated by icon-painters and wood-carvers from Samokov, Bansko and Kroushevo.

The present-day buildings were erected between 1834 and 1860 on the initiative of Neophyt Rilski by self-taught masters, who joined their skills to create this holy place, combining the grandeur of the landscape with the grandeur of the all-nation spirit.

### *The Monastery Courtyard*

The façades of the residential wings, the Church and the tower form a yard which looks secure as well as attractive and cheery. A lot of vaults, columns, which are the main architectural elements here, staircases, verandahs, murals and woodcarvings create this impression.

The form of the monastery is of an irregular quadrangle because the terrain here is uneven. The ground floor is built of stone, the second one of bricks and the third one of wood. The murals depicting flowers, birds, trees, human figures, coats of arms and others, painted yellow, red, green, black and white, contribute to the architectural variety. The wood emanates warmth and cosiness amid the austere mountain beauty. The turned banisters of the balconies emphasize the architectural line of the façades.

### *The Main Church of the Holy Virgin*

The old Hrelyo's Church survived the fire of 1833, but a larger one was needed because of the increased number of pilgrims. A request for the construction of a new modern church was sent to the Sultan by Neophyt Rilski on July 22, 1833. It was allowed and started during the second year after the fire, on May 1, 1834, and finished on October 26, 1837, but its interior artistic design stretched over a long period of time.

The main church is a three-aisled cruciform dome building. Its inner space is modelled by 2 rows of high columns, following its long axis. There are 3 apses in the altar. The two chapels, together with the choir stalls, enlarge the inside and support the narthex. The church is also notable for its acoustics, which is a result not only of the indoor architecture, but of the built-in earthenware pots in the corners under

the central dome as well. The row of pillars and arches relates the church to the style of the monastery wings.

In 1840 an agreement was signed to roof the church in lead, but only half of it was covered due to lack of money. In 1879 the roof was finished in copper. Another problem was the floor, but finally it was made of marble and black and green stone slabs, which form beautiful geometric ornaments. Some of the slabs bear the names of church donors.

The murals in the Holy Virgin Main Church were painted between 1840 and 1848 by some of the best artists of the time: Ivan Nikolov the Icon-painter, Zakhari Zograf, Dimiter Zograf and his son Simeon. the icons of the main altar were painted by Ivan Obrazopissov from Samokov.

The monumental religious murals keep to the ancient Byzantine iconographic tradition. The walls are entirely covered with murals which occupy strictly fixed spots. These are mainly biblical scenes. You can also see some new elements of earthly character which are in contrast with the strict medieval mysticism. The moralizing gospel parables are of great importance, too. Painted in the narthex, they show the Judgement Day, punished theft and inhospitality, etc.

The spirit of the National Revival is reflected through the portraits of many Bulgarian saints: St. John of Rila, George of Sofia, Yoakim of Osogovo, together with the portraits of Russian and Serbian ones, implying the idea of Slav unity. Another new element is the depiction of the church donors, which gives the correct idea of the Bulgarian Revival garments. In some of the biblical scenes the people even wear typical everyday clothes.

The painters were superb technologists; their artistic work has preserved the solidity and freshness of the colours to this very day. Some of the paints are natural, others - artificial. The glues were also of natural origin. The lime had to be matured, pure and white.

The frescoes are of mixed technique, typical of the National Revival mural painting. The artist used to begin his work on a wet wall and finish in distemper a section of the wall a day. The church is an example of the new trend which revived the 19th century religious painting.

### *The Historical Museum*

The Historical Museum, opened in 1965, occupies two floors in the new part of the eastern wing. The exposition, consisting of original written and material documents, follows the 10-century history of the monastery, and is arranged chronologically and thematically.

The first accounts of the monastery's establishment and development until the 14th century are displayed in the first large exhibition hall. A real "jewel" is the 18th century copy of St. John of Rila's "Testament", whose original is known to have been hidden during the Ottoman rule. Another work of his is the "Canon" - a manuscript of 1789. Nineteenth century engravings, depicting the meeting between Tzar Peter and St. John of Rila, add to the theme.

The exhibits concerning the 14th century are in the second hall. This was the time when the monastery had already become a powerful feudal entity and cultural centre. There is a gravestone with an inscription on it, dedicated to Hrelyo. Other valuable exhibits are: St. John of Rila's icon from the 14th century and the donation, signed by Tzar Ivan Shishman.

Next comes the second theme - the development of the Rila Monastery from the 15th to the 18th century. You can see the Turkish sultans' firmans, confirming the rights granted to the monastery, documents about its devastation and reconstruction, and about the transfer of St. John's relics in 1469; an agreement signed between the Rila Monastery and the Russian Monastery of Panteleimon in Athos, Russian icons and liturgical books. An inimitable masterpiece here is the woodcarved cross which took monk Raphael almost 12 years to finish. It has 140 biblical scenes and 1500 human figures on it, no larger than a grain of rice. After accomplishing his work the master lost his sight. Worth mentioning is the silver cover for a gospel, created by the goldsmith Matei of Sofia in 1577 as well as the Epistolary Gospel (13th century), the Kroupnik Gospel (15th century) and the Sougarsko Gospel (16th century), decorated with miniatures. The monastery museum collections also display a great number of church plates, jewellery, artistic fabrics and fretwork, coins and weapons. They all are exquisite examples of the original creative genius of the Bulgarians.

### *The Monastery Kitchen*

A very interesting place worth seeing is the Monastery Kitchen, the so called “magernitsa”, located in the northern wing, where food was prepared for the pilgrims during the greatest holidays, nearly 10 times a year. You can see the fireplaces with cauldrons over them. Unfortunately, the biggest copper cauldron has not been preserved. The kitchen is, in fact, a huge fireplace with 22-metre chimney. What rouses the interest is its construction - it is built of placed one above the other octagonal stones with small hemispherical niches to induce the necessary draughts. It is a unique example of building and architecture - a cone, passing through all floors by means of 10 rows of arches, topped by a small cupola, a work of master Alexi Rilets. In 1866 a bakery was built near it by master Marko from the Pernik region. The bread for the numerous visitors has been baked here for nearly 140 years.

Outside the monastery buildings you can visit the grave of James David Bourchier, who lived from 1859 to 1920. He was The Times correspondent in the Balkans and spent many year in Bulgaria. His final wish was to be buried here.

And now let me finish with the words of the first Bulgarian historian and founder of the Bulgarian National Revival, Paissiy of Khilendar, recorded in 1762 in his Slav-Bulgarian history: “Of all the Bulgarian glory when there were so many monasteries and churches earlier, the Lord has left only the Rila Monastery to exist in our times... It is of great use to all Bulgarians. Therefore, it is the duty of all Bulgarians to guard it and to give alms to the sacred Rila Monastery.”

## **41. The Bachkovo Monastery**

The famous Bachkovo Monastery, which is situated some 28 km south of Plovdiv, ranks second after the Rila Monastery, regarding its size and architectural, artistic and literary importance. It is nestling among the green hills of the Rhodope Mountains and, as you can see, may be reached along a road which passes through the old town of Assenovgrad and along the picturesque river Assenitsa.

The monastery was built in 1083, when Bulgaria was under Byzantine domination. Time has spared us some details about its establishment. The Byzantine commander Grigorii Bakouriani, a Georgian by birth who held high office during the reign of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus, rode his horse on this same road. His eyes saw a lot of bloodshed and he began to doubt and repent his deeds. It is thought to have happened right here. He gave ear to the murmuring waters of the beautiful river and something he had never felt before moved his heart. Emperor Alexius Comnenus had given him land for his victorious feats, and it turned out to be fertile and colourful. Then he made up his mind. He thrust his sceptre into the soil and announced to his soldiers that he and his brother Apasii had decided to build up a monastery to express their gratitude to God, who had blessed their arms. Thus the site was chosen and money provided by the two brothers. The monks in this monastery were brought over from Georgia, where Bakouriani had been a governor for a long time, about 50 in number. The monastery was proclaimed to be a self-governing body, and very soon after its foundation it became a wealthy landowner whose properties stretched as far as Thessaloniki. Unfortunately, three years later, in 1086, Grigorii Bakouriani fell in a battle with barbarian tribes near Plovdiv. We do not know whether his will to be buried in the monastery was fulfilled, but it may be so, because the oldest building preserved to this day is the church ossuary, which is near-

ly 500 m away from the monastery. Besides even today it is the most impressive building in the monastery ensemble with its fine architecture and valuable murals. Its general idea is foreign to old Bulgarian art, and is obviously influenced by Syrian and Armenian-Georgian architecture. It imitated the old Armenian vault churches. At the same time the construction of parallel rows of stones and bricks was unknown to the local builders, and that was the construction method of the first Bulgarian capitals Pliska and Preslav. When the Bulgarian Tzar Kaloyan (1207-1211) conquered the Rhodopes, the Bachkovo Monastery was included into the Bulgarian state.

Later, in 1344, when the Bulgarian Tzar Ivan Alexander regained the Rhodope mountains, the monastery was enlarged and populated with Bulgarians. The Tzar himself generously donated to it by granting it land and money. His full-length portrait stands next to the portraits of Bakouriani and his brother Apasii in the narthex of the upper floor of the ossuary.

The shrine of a Thracian horseman, dating from 2nd-4th century AD near the monastery shows that it had been a place of worship for generations before, but now it developed into a cradle of culture on a much larger scale. It trained pupils from Armenia who returned home to preach the Christian creed. Greek books were translated here and new books were written. It is also supposed to have been one of the earliest hospitals in Bulgaria, because it was a school of medicine, with a hospital, where two doctors and two attendants worked.

In 1396-97 Bulgaria finally succumbed to the Ottoman troops, but the monastery remained intact. It became the shelter of the last Bulgarian Patriarch Euthymius, who was exiled here. He continued his literary work and thus carried on the Tarnovo Literary school. The monastery preserved the Bulgarian national spirit and that was why a century later, during a wave of Mohammedanization, the buildings were set on fire and a period of decline followed. The only building that survived was the Church of the Holy Trinity, which contains some murals of great value, known as the ossuary. It was built in the 11th century and painted during the 11th-12th centuries by Juhn Iveropul, who was a Georgian master-painter. But scholars think that it was, in all probability, painted by two masters, according to the style: the

murals represent the aristocratic art, the monumental-spiritualistic style of Byzantine imperial rule at its height - the figures are stern, gloomy and absorbed, foreign to all worldly things, forceful and severe. The ossuary itself is a two-storeyed basilica, built of alternating layers of white stone and red bricks on the site of the former church of St. Mary in 1604. In fact, it was in the 17th century that the reconstruction of the monastery began. In 1601 the refectory was built, but the murals on the outside were painted by Alexi Atanassov during the second part of the 19th century. The main scene here depicts the Procession of the Miraculous icon, which was hidden in a cave at the time of the destruction of the monastery by the Turks and 200 years later found by accident. Up to this day every year the ritual of this procession is repeated to commemorate its discovery. You can also see the portraits of the Byzantine Emperor Alexius Comnenus, surrounded by Grigorii and Apasii Bakouriani, Saint Demetrius, Saint George and others. The inside of the refectory was painted by an unknown Bulgarian artist from Thessaloniki, who depicted the Jesse Tree with 12 Greek philosophers on the ceiling; scenes from the life of the Virgin and portraits of hermits; the Last Judgement, painted in the 11th century, which is the oldest non-canonical painting in our country, and the portraits of Alexander the Great and Augustus can be seen on the east wall and on the west wall - the Blessing Christ surrounded by the Virgin and Saint John the Baptist together with St. Basil and St. Gregory on either side. A Greek inscription reads that it was donated to the monastery by the Bishop of Philippopolis, Damaskin, and made by master Nikola.

In 1604 the Church of the Assumption was built in the place of the monastery's oldest church, destroyed by the Turks. The building has survived to this day in its original structure of a three-aisled basilica with a large narthex and a dome. The murals in the narthex were painted in 1643 and depict life-size portraits of Georgi and his son Constantine, who were high-ranking notables in Constantinople and donors to the church. The frescoes in the nave were painted later, in 1850, by master Mosco of Adrianople. Some old icons are kept in the church, the most valuable one being a Georgian icon of the Virgin and Child from the 13th century, known as the Miraculous icon.

The Church of the Archangels is next to the Church of the Assumption, but experts do not know for certain when it was built. Some relate it to the 13th century, others to a much later date. Its narthex and arcade were painted by Zakhari Zograf, a Bulgarian master-painter of the National Revival period, who was an original artist and innovator and one of the pioneers of Bulgarian pictorial art. He did his work in 1840, depicting scenes from different parables such as The Wise Virgins, The Widow's Mite, etc., as well as the portraits of Alexius Comnenus, who had given the land to Gregorii Bakouriani.

The Church of Saint Nicholas is the newest built in a side yard of the monastery in 1837. It was again Zakhari Zograf who painted the murals here in 1840. The narthex contains frescoes of Jesus Christ, The Virgin and Saint John the Baptist, The Twelve Apostles, The Creation of Adam and Eve, Cain and Abel as well as others, but the most notable one is his painting of the Last Judgement, where he depicted the faces of living rich men and women, his contemporaries, who opposed the establishment of a Bulgarian school in Plovdiv, among the sinners. On one of the adjacent walls you can see the artist's self-portrait standing next to the abbot and his deacon, with a roll in his hand, which reads: "Painted by my own hand".

The monastery's history was a turbulent and eventful one, proofs of which are housed in the monastery museum: presents received at different times; old manuscripts and books written or translated here; a rich collection of church objects, most of which were the work of the skilful hands of Bulgarian craftsmen, etc. Everything here makes it a holy place that has treasured our culture, spirit and national consciousness.

## 42. The Shipka Pass

Each time we pass through the Shipka Pass we cannot but think of the Russo-Turkish War, when 6000 Russians and Bulgarians resisted a 27000-strong Ottoman force in August 1877. This war was intended to cast off the unbearable yoke which had begun almost 5 centuries earlier.

The conquest of Tsimpe, a small Byzantine fort, in 1352, is considered to have marked the offensive of Asiatic Islamism against Christian Europe. The extreme political separateness and lack of political trust prevented them from building up a strong military and political alliance against the common enemy. The Balkan states, engaged in incessant wars, resisted the danger heroically for a long time, but did not unite against it. Besides, they were split into several state formations.

In the reign of Ivan Alexander (1331-71) Bulgaria was divided into four states: Ivan Stratsimir, the son of Ivan Alexander, ruled over North-West Bulgaria, with Vidin as its capital; Momchil, a former serf, had his domains in the Rhodopes; local lords ruled North-East Bulgaria, while Ivan Alexander with his son Ivan Shishman ruled in Tarnovo.

The agony of the medieval Bulgarian state began in 1364, when the Turks took Central Thrace with Plovdiv and Stara Zagora. Later, in 1372, they invaded Bulgaria once more and took a number of fortresses in the Rhodopes, Thrace, and at the foothills of the Balkan Range. As a result the new Bulgarian tzar Ivan Shishman (1371-93) was forced to become a vassal to the Turkish sultan. In 1393, after a long siege, the Ottomans captured Tarnovo, and in 1395 tzar Ivan Shishman was killed in the defence of Nicopolis on the Danube. Only the state of Vidin remained independent. In 1396 over 60000 West European crusaders, led by king Sigismund, invaded the Bulgarian lands. The troops

of the last Bulgarian state's ruler, Ivan Sratsimir (1356-96/7), joined this army, but beneath the walls of the Bulgarian fortress of Nicopolis the crusaders were defeated. The Vidin state also lost its independence.

Then, the hardest period in the history of the Bulgarian people began. The Ottomans showed all their cruelty. It is estimated that almost half of Bulgaria's population was massacred or enslaved and transported to another part of the empire within a few years of the Turkish conquest. Bulgaria's natural development as a Christian European state was interrupted. The country was isolated from the European Renaissance, its people were forced to live under a severer system of feudalism than had previously existed. The Turks ruthlessly destroyed all Bulgarian state and religious structures, aiming at national, economic, cultural and religious assimilation. The colonists occupied the most fertile lands and prosperous towns. The Bulgarian people was reduced to the category of the so called "rayah", meaning "a herd". The peasants became serfs of the Turkish spahis (landowning knights), and had their land taken away.

The Bulgarian Patriarchate was destroyed and subordinated to the Greek Patriarchate. Monasteries and libraries were burnt to the ground. The Bulgarians were not entitled to building churches.

Worst of all was the perpetual insecurity and the numerous taxes, about 80 in number. The Turks did not attempt to populate Bulgaria with Turks or to convert all Bulgarians to Islam, but they did something else. They imposed the so called "flesh blood tax" - a levy of Christian youths, which was particularly heavy and humiliating. At regular intervals the authorities had the healthiest boys taken away from their families, sent to the capital, converted into Islam, and then made join the elite janissary corps. Furthermore, whole areas, especially in the Rhodope Mountains, were forced to adopt Islam and new Arab names. The objectors were slain, and those who did convert thereafter were called "pomaks", meaning "caused to suffer", and allowed to go on living in the Bulgarian environment. The present-day Bulgarian Muslims, representing about five percent of modern Bulgaria's population, are descendants of those Islam converts. According to some Bulgarian historians, the beginning of the Turkish oppression in the 15th century found Bulgaria with a population of

about 1.3 million. One hundred years later the Bulgarians were already down to 260000 people and remained as many in the course of two more centuries.

The picture wasn't completely negative. While the Ottoman empire was at its height, it gave the Bulgarian people access to its links with other countries, trade routes, etc. Thus it enabled Bulgarian merchants to accumulate wealth and, as a result, to help the first steps of the Bulgarian National Revival.

The unbearable conditions during this era of darkness and suffering did not crush the spirit of the Bulgarians. Initially, deprived of social and political organizations of their own, they were not able to undertake any resistance of great importance. The "haidouk" movement was the first form of armed resistance, despite its local nature, against the oppressors. Brave young men formed bands to protect the people against the cruelties of the authorities.

Armed uprisings and revolts were the most striking manifestations of the Bulgarian struggle for freedom. They were not well organized, broke out spontaneously or with the advance of the troops of any European country against the Turks. The first uprising broke out still in 1408. Significant uprisings, proclaiming the independence of Bulgaria, took place in 1598, 1686, 1688, and 1689. All of them failed and were put down with unheard-of atrocities.

The decline of the Ottoman empire was marked by military defeats at the hands of Christian Europe and by a weakening of central authorities. Both of these factors were significant for developments in Bulgaria. Under Catherine II the Great Russia began to protect the Orthodox population of the Ottoman empire. Besides, the central government was not able to control the spahis and local officials. In the second part of the 18th century, the process of disintegration in the military and feudal system of the Empire became very great. The Great Powers insisted on "preserving the integrity of the Ottoman State". Thus the Eastern Question focused the efforts of a declining Empire, of the Great Powers, and the national liberation movements of the subjected Balkan peoples.

During the Crimean War (1853-56) Russia suffered defeat at the hands of the powerful coalition between Austria, England, France, Sardinia and Turkey, which reduced its influence. But it was in these

years that the Bulgarian national liberation movement gained momentum. Vassil Levski put forward the idea of an independent development of the Bulgarian national revolution, and in the 70s of the 19th century the Internal Revolutionary Organization was built up. This new active force was constantly on the look out for the convenient moment to burst out in a struggle against the enslavers. All the public forces were interested in doing away with Ottoman yoke. The development of the Bulgarian revolutionary process was supported by the favourable international situation. Russia overcame the crisis which followed the Crimean War; a national uprising broke out in Bosnia and Herzegovina; Serbia and Montenegro were preparing for war against the Ottoman empire. Under these conditions a new Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee was founded in the autumn of 1875 in a deserted house outside Ghiurghiu, presided by Stefan Stambolov. It took the decision to prepare a general Bulgarian uprising in the spring of the following year. The country was divided into four revolutionary districts. In January 1876 the Apostles, as the people called them, crossed over the frozen Danube to carry into Bulgaria the great news of the coming revolt. The whole country was engaged in the preparations for the uprising - arms were bought, bullets were cast, rebel uniforms were made... People from many regions, especially in the Sredna Gora and the foothills of the Rhodope Mountains were looking forward eagerly to take part in the decisive battle. Unfortunately many other regions and the emigrés in Wallachia lagged behind.

On April 14 the apostles of the Panagyurishte district decided the uprising to begin on the 1st or 11th of May. The preparation was still going on when, due to treachery, the uprising broke out 10 days earlier, on April 20, 1876. The signal for the revolt was given in the small town of Koprivshtitsa in the Sredna Gora Mountains after receiving the bloodstained appeal or the so called Bloody Letter, sent by Todor Kableshkov. Georgi Benkovski proclaimed the outbreak of the uprising. The ringing of thousands of bells announced the hour of resurrection. The villages to the south-west of Panagyurishte rose one after the other; after Sredna Gora, the revolt spread to the towns and villages of the Rhodope foothills.

The Turkish authorities knew about this revolt, but they could not prevent it. Now it had begun, regular Ottoman troops and bashibozouk were sent against the rebel towns and villages, and soon they were flooded with blood and tears. The Turks were well-supplied with the most up-to-date weapons produced in Krupp's Works, while the rebel artillery consisted of guns made out of cherry-trees. Despite this fact the insurgents showed great self-sacrifice and heroism; churches and monasteries were turned into fortresses - the detachment of Priest Hariton and Bacho Kiro fortified their position in the Dryanovo Monastery, where for 9 days on end they drove back the enemy. The capital of the uprising, Panagyurishte, also suffered heavy losses. The rebels and their families locked themselves in the local church, but the bashibozouks managed to set it on fire. Then Kocho Chistemenski and Spass Ginov killed their wives and children and put an end to their own lives. After their example, other people did the same. The atrocities in the town of Batak were described by the famous American journalist Januarius MacGahan, special correspondent of the British newspaper "Daily News". He sent 13 articles to London during his tours in Bulgaria. After receiving the first six reports, including "The Massacre of Batak - the Valley of Death and of People without Tears", the editor of "Daily News" published them in a separate brochure together with "A Preliminary Report" by the American diplomat and scientist Eugene Schuyler. This brochure became the document which played the most important role in acquainting the world public with the Turkish monstrous cruelty in Bulgaria.

Just when the uprising was crushed, the legendary detachment of Hristo Botev landed near Kozlodoui on May 17, after seizing the Austrian ship "Radetzki". But the local people did not join the 200 armed men who fought fierce battles. They were finally defeated after the death of their leader. That was the end of the April Epic.

Despite the bravery of the Bulgarian people, the April Uprising ended in defeat, but the sacrifices were not made in vain - it struck such a heavy blow to the Ottoman empire that it was no longer able to deal with the "Bulgarian question".

The brutality with which the uprising was suppressed aroused indignation and protest in many European countries. The British Prime

Minister Disraeli declared that he did not care of the fate of the Bulgarians when Britain's state interests were at stake. But he was later compelled to change his position.

From July 1876 a movement in defence of the Bulgarians appeared in England. The prominent British statesman William Gladstone, after reading the brochure, made a speech and headed the opposition against Disraeli's policy of non-interference. Soon the whole of Europe raised a voice of protest in defense of the heroic Bulgarian people, whose courage and fortitude impressed greatly whole nations and won the hearts of the people in favour of Bulgaria's freedom.

The April Uprising was headed by the bourgeoisie and the revolutionary intellectuals who emerged from its circles, but they did not prove to be well-prepared leaders. Economically and politically crushed by bondage, this class did not succeed in leading its own revolution to a victorious end. Besides, the uprising did not receive any international help, but nevertheless it managed to lay the foundations of Bulgaria's liberation, which was brought by the Russian Army in 1878.

The Shipka Pass was the scene of the memorable Battle of Shipka. This pass has been known since ancient times. Here the Romans paved a road connecting Constantinople with Nicopolis ad Istrum. Later it played an important role during the numerous battles against Bulgaria's enemies, owing to its strategic importance.

On April 12 (24), 1877 the Russian emperor Alexander II declared war on Turkey. On 15 (27) June the Russian troops crossed the Danube and by the end of the day more than 25 000 soldiers had stepped on Bulgarian lands. At the end of June, their number reached 100 000. The army was divided into three parts. The Advance Detachment, led by General Gurko, included about 12 000 soldiers. It headed southwards, liberated Tarnovo on July 7, crossed the Balkan Range, and many Bulgarian towns and villages were granted their freedom. The General wanted to reach and capture Adrianople. In the meantime the Western Detachment was slowly marching on Pleven, which had been turned into an impregnable fortress by numerous Turkish troops. Another Turkish army, led by Suleiman Pasha,

approached Shipka Pass in order to join the other Turkish armies in North Bulgaria. The Advance Detachment was the only power that was able to stop the enemy from reaching Pleven. That was the reason why General Gurko decided to open hostilities against the Turks. His army was joined by volunteer force, which had its first taste of gunpowder near the towns of Stara and Nova Zagora. The Bulgarian volunteers proved that they deserved their freedom. The Orlov regiment and 5 500 Bulgarians fortified the Shipka Pass under the command of General Stoletov. Their small number and insufficient equipment made the General dispose his troops on the peaks of St. Nikola (present-day Mount Stoletov) and Orlovo Gnezdo, meaning Eagle's Nest. Initially, the defence was successful, but the Turks launched several successive attacks. Although some 200 Bulgarian volunteers and the Briansk regiment had joined the defenders, they were in a dangerous condition - encircled and shelled by the enemy artillery. There were many casualties, the ammunition was running out. So they had to use heavy boulders and the dead bodies of their fallen brothers-in-arms in order to prevent the Turkish army from crossing the Balkan Range. At nightfall, the desperate situation was put an end to with the arrival of fresh reinforcements sent by General Radetski. The violent fighting continued for three more days and the Turks failed to capture the peak. The great battle ended on August 14 (26), 1877. The new Turkish commander, Reuf Pasha, took no risk of resuming the attempts to join the army of Mehmed Pasha.

Osman Pasha, who had fortified his position in Pleven, and his army were besieged, their supplies were disrupted, and they finally surrendered on November 28 (December 10), 1878.

The victory at Shipka Pass inflicted heavy casualties on the enemy, made them unable to organize their resistance, and under the favourable conditions the Russian army succeeded in liberating the whole of Bulgaria. The Russo-Turkish War (1877-78) ended on February 19 (March 3), 1878 with the signing of the Treaty of San Stefano, which answered the demands of the Balkan peoples.

Nowadays the scenery and war memorials attract many visitors. The golden domes of the Shipka Memorial Church rise from the wooded hillside north of the village of Shipka. It was built in 1896, after the

Liberation, to commemorate both Russians and Bulgarians, who fell in the war, and was paid for by public donations on the initiative of General Skobelev's mother, Olga Nikolaevna, and Count Ignatiev. The church was designed by architect Tomishko in the traditional style of Russian Orthodox churches of the 17th century, topped off with the distinctive 50 m-high spire of the bell tower. The interior was directed by the Russian painter Prof. Pomerantsev, and is considered to be the best example of the academic realist style which flourished in Bulgaria at the turn of the century. Folk-influenced floral and geometric patterns weave their way around naturalistic depictions of Bulgarian saints and tzars. Many of the tzars are dressed up in Byzantine costumes to remind of the pre-World War I days, when Bulgaria's desire to extend its frontiers towards the former Imperial capital was reflected in a passion for all things Byzantine.

The iconostasis, made by Prof. Yagna, is gilded. There are many icons as well, the most valuable being an old Russian icon from the 17th century of Jesus Christ, and the icon of the Nativity and of Tzar Boris I by Anton Mitov. A number of other icons were presented by the Orlov and Briansk regiments, which took part in the defence of the pass. A huge mural of Jesus Christ was painted on the central dome by Prof. Myasoedov. Other murals portray great figures in Russian history - the 14th century ruler Dimitri Donskoi, who is being blessed before going off to smash the Tartars, and an allegorical scene of Sts. Cyril and Methodius bringing literacy to the Slavs.

Thirty-four tablets bear the names of the fallen Bulgarian and Russian soldiers, whose remains are kept in 18 marble sarcophagi.

Now the church, together with the Shipka Monastery, is a symbol of an epoch-making event for Bulgaria - the final outcome of the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78, and just like most of the Bulgarian monasteries and churches, it is more than just a place of worship.

### **43. The Valley of Roses**

The Valley of Roses lies between the Balkan Mountains and Sredna Gora Mountains to the south. It is protected from the north winds while the warm south winds easily penetrate the valley, thus making it the ideal place for cultivation of roses. Mint, lavender and other oil - yielding plants are grown here. Lavender, for one, was first planted here in 1903 while industrial growing was introduced in 1920. Today yields of lavender per hectare are up to 3000 kg fresh blossom from which 10 to 12 kg oil are obtained. Lavender helps to prevent erosion on steep slopes and bees collect nectar for aromatic honey, known for its curative properties. Lavender sachets placed among woolen garments keep out moths.

The valley is mainly known for its rose fields which have given it its name. It is hard to say when roses appeared for the first time, but it seems likely that their fragrance was initially enjoyed by the inhabitants of Ancient Egypt, India and Persia. The Ancient Greeks were also enchanted by them. They thought that roses were made from sea foam just like Aphrodite, the goddess of beauty, who emerged from it. Even today roses as symbols of eternal youth, ultimate beauty and happiness are a compulsory attribute to all festive occasions in people's lives.

More than 10 000 varieties of roses are known nowadays, but only about 200 have oil-yielding properties. The Bulgarian oil-yielding roses - the red "rosa damascena" and the white "rosa alba" have been grown for more than 200 years in this valley. Rose - growing began as a small cottage industry during the 1830s supposedly started by a Turkish merchant impressed by the fragrance of the wild Shipka rose. The attar of roses was initially obtained in small domestic stills comprising a copper cauldron from which water-cooled pipes dripped the greenish-yellow rose oil. The attar was collected in glass vessels kept in dark, cool places. Rose-growing became big business early in

the 20th century but virtually ceased during World War II when Nazi Germany discouraged the industry in order to sell its own ersatz scents, but since then Bulgaria's rose - growers have vastly expanded their operations.

Each acre planted with roses yields up to 1 400 kilograms of blossom, or roughly 3 million rosebuds; between 3 000 and 6 000 kilos are required to make one litre of attar, leaving a residue of rosewater and pulp used to make medicaments, flavourings, jam and liqueur. The rose bushes are allowed to grow to head height, and are harvested the end of May or the beginning of June between 3 am and 8 am before the sun rises and evaporates up to half of the oil. Equipped with wicker baskets, women and girls do most of the picking, while carts or lorries carry the petals away to the modern distilleries around Rozino, Karnare, Karlovo and Kazanluk. Kazanluk also has a research institute where pesticides are tested and different breeds of roses developed.

At present Bulgaria produces over 70 per cent of the attar of roses offered on the international market. No well - known perfumery firm in Europe can do without attar of roses in its most expensive products. One kilogram of this product has the value of one kilogram of gold, a fact which explains why roses are known as "Bulgaria's gold".

Kazanluk, the main town in the region, is the venue for the Festival of Roses, celebrated annually at the beginning of the rose-picking season. Young boys and girls, dressed in picturesque national costumes, pick the rose petals, sing and dance ritual dances while children deck the spectators with rose wreaths.

The Valley of Roses is dotted with small, picturesque towns which appear unexpectedly one after the other along the road from Sofia to Kazanluk - Klissura, Sopot, Karlovo, Kalofer... - a clutch of towns associated with famous Bulgarian patriots. The valley, itself, looks attractively lush throughout the year with its groves of fruit trees, pastures with wild flowers and herbs scattered all over, the surrounding hills covered by dense forests and the white-washed, sunlit houses of its towns.

The small town of Klisura is dramatically situated at the head of the valley in a narrow gorge. The town was founded after the Ottoman conquest by Bulgarians seeking refuge in the mountains. It flourished

in the 18th and 19th centuries when cattle breeding and sheep - breeding were practised on a large scale. The craft industry also developed, mainly cloth weaving and rug making. There were a number of rose distilleries. The merchants of Klissura sold their goods throughout the vast Turkish Empire, even had their offices abroad. The prosperity of the town's people found expression in the construction of two-storeyed private houses and a big church whose bell was cast in Russia and whose marble flooring came from Italy.

The local school was open in 1822, and Hristo G. Danov, a famous publisher, worked there as a teacher.

The town was almost completely burned down during the April Rising and many of its inhabitants were put to death.

Today Klissura is an agricultural town. Its population is employed in rose - and fruit - growing and stock - breeding. There is also a saw mill and a carpet factory.

### *Sopot*

The name of the town comes from the Slav word for water spout. The town was founded before the Ottoman conquest. The Turks called it "Akhche Klisse" meaning "white church". There really was a large white church in the highest part of the town. Ivan Vazov, father of Bulgarian literature, described the 19th century Sopot in his epic "Under the Yoke". Vazov was born in 1850 to the family of a Sopot merchant. His youthful patriotism took him into exile in Rumania, where he met other Bulgarian revolutionaries and began writing for emigre journals. On returning to Sopot he threw himself into revolutionary politics, but was forced to flee town on the eve of the April Rising because of the threat of immediate arrest. The events of April 1876 inspired Vazov to write his best poems. After the liberation he devoted himself to editing newspapers in Plovdiv, then the capital of Eastern Roumelia. Fleeing to Odessa after Stambolov's coup in 1886, Vazov wrote the classic tale of "Under the Yoke" which is acclaimed as Bulgaria's "national novel". Returning home later, he entered parliament and became minister of education, continuing to write a stream of novels, articles and poems until his death in Sofia in 1921, where he was buried on Alexander Nevski Square.

The main square in Sopot features a bronze statue of the poet and his birthplace, now a museum, is one of the main attractions of the place. The premises of the house, grouped around a vine - shaded courtyard, suggest a comfortable upbringing in the home of a middle - class merchant. The exhibited domestic utensils are reasonably functional, save for the imported porcelain in the guest room. An adjacent modern building contains a pictorial history of Vazov's career, including photographs of those of his Sopot contemporaries who provided the basis for characters in "Under the Yoke".

Another sight of old Sopot is the nunnery where Levski (who founded a revolutionary committee here) took refuge on a number of occasions when chased by the Turks. The nunnery offered him shelter thanks to the Mother - Superior who was a relative of the great revolutionary. Although people in Sopot were great patriots, they couldn't take part in the April Rising because the committee members were betrayed and arrested. During the Russo-Turkish War of Liberation of 1877 the town suffered considerably. After the Liberation Sopot, which had been a thriving town with the first glass works on the Balkans established here, declined.

Over the last few years the appearance of Sopot has been changed by modern flats and a machine - building works. Oil - yielding plants are also extensively grown.

### *Karlovo*

Set against the lofty crags and hollows descending to slopes partly covered with cypresses and fig trees, Karlovo looks somewhat unimpressive in comparison with its surroundings. However, its old quarter, the subject of much recent renovation, is worthy of exploration. The ensemble of 19th century houses is grouped around the statue of the towns most famous son - Vassil Levski. Aleksandrov's house with its pillared porch and curved gables is a real triumph of National Revival architecture. One of the nicest of the old houses of Karlovo is the house of Hristo Pop Vassilev, now a local teachers' centre, where the building's orielled upper storeys and symmetrical appearance show the influence of Plovdiv styles. The Town Museum is housed in a former school and contains an extensive folklore collec-

tion. Other interesting sights are the colonnaded basilica of St. Nicholas and Kurshum Dzhamiya (“lead-roofed mosque”) which dates back to 1485 and features an ornate porch supported by cedarwood pillars and a red-brick minaret.

Vassil Levski museum house is a plain rectangular building with a small verandah and sparse living quarters. Its only ornamentation is a single shelf running along the wall almost at ceiling level, with pewter dishes arranged along it. At the side of the house is the dyeing shed, where Levski’s mother worked, and which represents a small alcove filled with big earthenware pots, a brazier, and balls of coloured cord. Behind the house, an exhibition hall harbours photographs of Levski and his comrades in the First and Second Bulgarian Legions in Belgrade; and among other slogans and texts, a list of the various pseudonyms used by Levski when travelling incognito. Vassil Levski (1837-1872) dedicated himself to the cause of Bulgaria’s liberation. Choosing exile like many patriots, he joined Rakovski’s Bulgarian Legion in Belgrade. The Legion’s raids across the border into Bulgaria infuriated the Turks but won little sympathy from the local population - leading Levski to conclude that Ottoman rule could only be overthrown by a revolutionary organization based within Bulgaria. Levski and fellow - exile Lyuben Karavelov took control of the Bucharest - based Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee in 1867, where they began elaborating the theory that an elite group of committed activists, or “apostles”, should carry out the task of constructing a revolutionary network within the country. From 1869 on Levski set about establishing just that: gathering recruits as he ranged across the country in a variety of disguises. Captured near Lovech at the end of 1872, Levski was executed the following February in Sofia. Levski was called “The Apostle of Freedom” by the Bulgarians and became a legend within his own lifetime.

Karlovo is also the birthplace of Ivan Bogorov, founder of the first Bulgarian daily newspaper and editor of a number of periodicals; Hristo Georgiev and Evlogi Georgiev, the public benefactors; Raino Popovich and Botyo Petkov, well-known educationalists.

Karlovo, a developed crafts centre in the 18th and the 19th centuries, has been growing economically in the past years. There are fac-

tories producing silk and cotton textiles and foodstuffs. An engineering plant makes tractors of small size, specially suitable for vineyard cultivation. There are also rose and mint distilleries. Karlovo is also renowned for its delicious dry white wine "Karlovski Misket".

### *Kalofer*

Situated in the vicinity of some of the grandest peaks in the Balkans, Kalofer lies on both banks of the river Tundzha, emerging from the southern slopes of Mount Botev. According to legend, the town was founded by Kalifer, a voivoda who fought the Turks, and oppressed Bulgarians in gratitude named the place after him. Later Kalofer was granted some privileges by the Turks in return for its responsibility to protect the nearby passes. In the 18th and the 19th centuries it became a centre of various crafts. The first school was established in 1840 and the staff included some famous teachers of that period.

Today Kalofer is the centre of a rich agricultural area. Large fields are planted with roses and other oil - yielding plants, vines and fruit trees. There is a factory for making shirts, a rose-distillery and a woodworking plant.

There is a special school for pupils whose delicate health requires a mild climate.

The most attractive sight of the town is the childhood home of the great Bulgarian poet and revolutionary, Hristo Botev. He is perhaps the most romantic figure in Bulgaria's pantheon of heroes. Botev (1848-1876) learnt patriotism from his father and radical ideas while studying at Odessa, after which he gravitated towards the Bulgarian emigre community in Bessarabia and later went to Bucharest in search of the Secret Revolutionary Committee. There he shared a garret with Levski and subsequently worked with Karavelov on *Budilnik* ("Alarm-clock") and *Zname* ("Banner"), two radical papers in which he published political essays and poems. A utopian socialist, and a man of action, Botev responded to news of the April Rising by hijacking a steamer and landing on Bulgarian soil with 200 men to aim the rebels, but was killed in action near Vratsa. The highest peak in the Balkan Range (2376 m), looming to the north of Kalofer, now bears his name.

## 44. Koprivshtitsa

The town of Koprivshtitsa lies in a small valley through which the Topolnitsa flows. Although it is situated at an altitude of about 1000 m, its climate is mild and favourable for year-round tourism.

The town is a unique combination of legendary history and fascinating present. More than 388 architectural and historical monuments make Koprivshtitsa one of the most attractive tourist destinations in the country. The name of the town became known as the venue of the largest folk festival held every five years in August on one of the neighbouring hills.

The beauty of the town fails description. One cannot but feel enchanted by the silvery river, the quiet forests, the spacious meadows, the bracing air, the cobble-paved peaceful streets, the magic of stone and wood.

If you look at Koprivshtitsa from one of the hills around, the town resembles a colourful bunch of forest flowers with its red tiles, whitewashed walls, green slim fir and birch trees, yellow, blue, orange, purple and lilac tinge of the houses. The ancient hunchbacked bridges impart inimitable charm to the town; crystal-clear brooks that spring in the cool forests around ripple over quiet stones. The town is a picturesque tangle of narrow streets, as if riverlets are flowing down from God knows where to the central square, amidst a cluster of houses humbly steeped in eternal seclusion. The soul of this town is deeply patriarchal and consoling. The beauty of the Revival Period house is omnipresent. Each house fits perfectly into the surroundings and feasts the eye and warms the heart. Solid stone walls and columns beam courage and power, oriels and bay windows intimate tenderness and coquetry.

For many centuries the town was an important economic, cultural and patriotic centre for Bulgarians and Bulgaria. Some historians

trace its name from "koup reki" ("a number of rivers"); others from the Greek word "Kopros" meaning "gathering" or "dung-hill". The word was introduced by Karakachans, a hellenised tribe of unknown origin, which used to spend the summer months on the Sredna Gora slopes with their flocks of sheep.

It is assumed that Koprivshtitsa was founded after the Ottoman conquest in the 14th century by shepherds who were attracted by the good grazing grounds. Under the Ottoman domination it gained some privileges, including free pasture for its numerous flocks along the Aegean in winter. A Turkish sultan issued a decree granting complete autonomy to the government of the town; the Bulgarians were allowed to settle in the town, to carry arms and to wear colour clothes just like the Muslims. The Turkish authorities had to consider the opinion of the council of elders. Turks were not allowed to settle in the town nor could they stay for the night or ride in the streets. A mosque was never built in Koprivshtitsa.

At its heyday Koprivshtitsa numbered 12 000 inhabitants, as many as Sofia on the eve of the Liberation; there were 120 000 sheep, 20 000 cattle and 2 000 stallions and mares. The local people were ambitious and respected craftsmen and merchants. One of them, Hadzhi Nencho Palaveev by name, even had shares of the Suez canal. Another man, Petko Doganov, a merchant and a donor of the Rila monastery, was so rich that when he visited the monastery, he was accompanied by one hundred servants and bodyguards.

At the beginning of the 19th century, after having achieved economic independence and prosperity the citizens of Koprivshtitsa strove to channel this into intellectual development. Many young people sent abroad to prestigious schools came back with the most advanced ideas of the time. The money accumulated was not just put aside - it was used to build the new image of the town which would correspond to the new social status of its inhabitants. Local traditions intermingled with what had been picked up from the outside world gave rise to the unique mixture we call today Koprivshtitsa architecture. There are no houses alike, although they all possess the common features of the Bulgarian National Revival House: the balancing curved line on the painted gables, façade arches, door lintels, wall-cupboards and niches,

carved wooden ceilings and columns, double symmetrical staircases outside and inside the house, painted niches in the rooms known as "alafranghi", the verandahs with their rest areas, the enclosed courtyards, the heavy wooden gates... Each house is a world in itself.

Koprivshtitsa enjoyed an active cultural life, too. The second Bulgarian school was founded here in 1837 by Neophyt Rilski. Ten years later Naiden Gerov founded a classical school, which was followed by a girls' school. The citizens were very active in the struggle for national independence. The April Rising of 1876 broke out in Koprivshtitsa ahead of schedule. When the rising was severely put down the town managed to avoid being destroyed by paying a large ransom.

Koprivshtitsa was the birthplace of many revolutionaries and National Revival figures.

Today the population is mainly employed in agriculture - stock-breeding and market-gardening, although some industries are also developed on a small scale - there are factories for building materials, asbestos and carpets. Flax and lavender are also grown in the region.

Oslekov's House, a pearl of Bulgarian Revival architecture, was built in 1856. Its owner was a merchant who had travelled a lot in the East and had acquired a taste for Oriental splendour, so much so, that the exquisite shape and colour of his house recalls memories of the Arabian Nights. Some of the material for the house was brought from Asia Minor as, for example, the beautiful slim columns of cedar wood supporting the three gracefully vaulted arches of the gate. The wall-painting on the façade which resembles townscapes of Venice was painted by masters from Samokov. Floral and geometrical motifs are depicted on the medallions between the windows.

The house has impressive spacious parlours. The extremely rich decoration, the carved ceilings, the elegant forms of the niches and the fireplaces diversify the interior. Every room has a different predominating colour of paint, hence its name: the Red or the Blue Room. One of the medallions painted on the wall of the Red Room shows the original, symmetrical plan of the house which was never realized since Oslekov's neighbours refused to sell him the necessary land.

Oslekov himself shared the fate of the other insurgents who took

an active part in the April Rising. He was put to prison and then murdered.

Karavelov's House is the birthplace of Lyuben Karavelov, a prominent Bulgarian writer. He was born in 1834 and got his education in Moscow. His career was typical of the many patriots who spent long years in exile trying to find support for the Bulgarian cause. Karavelov was a strong believer in the need to attract Russian and Serbian help in the struggle to liberate Bulgaria from the Turks. For years he advocated armed struggle against the Turks, then, after Levski's execution, however, he gave up those ideas in favour of change through reform and education.

Built in several stages and surrounded by a high wall, the house contains the usual examples of 19th century domestic interiors. An old printing press, bought in Belgrade and shipped to Bulgaria after the Liberation is also on show there. An adjoining summer house contains the personal belongings of Lyuben's younger brother Petko, an eminent liberal politician after the Liberation and twice prime minister of the country.

Dimcho Debelyanov's House was probably built before 1840 by the poet's grandfather. It is the birthplace of the poet and his room, arranged to show the quiet domestic atmosphere of his work, recalls his tragically short career. Debelyanov's grave is in the courtyard of the church of the Holy Virgin. There, Lazarov's statue of a seated woman reminds visitors of Debelyanov's old mother, who waited in vain for her son's return from the battlefields of Greece, where he was killed in 1916 at the age of 29. The inscription is from one of his poems: "Delaying in a gentle dream she becomes her own child."

The Church of the Assumption, the oldest in Koprivshtitsa, was built in 1817 on the site of an earlier church. It is partially sunken into the ground to comply with the Ottoman requirements that no Christian building should be taller than the local mosque. The church acquired its domed belfry at a later date. The iconostasis is the work of a master of Tryavna and dates from 1821. Some of the icons were painted by Zakhari Zograf and are among his best works.

Kableshkov's House, the birthplace of the great revolu-

tionary who gave the first signal for the April Rising, is a good example of the symmetrical plan. It was built in 1845. The ground floor of the house preserves the simple living quarters of a reasonably prosperous nineteenth century family, including the "women's work room" where the spinning wheel and weaving loom were used to produce some of Koprivshtitsa's renowned woollens. The second floor houses the Museum of the April Rising. The exhibits include: the insurgents' silk banner embroidered with the Bulgarian Lion and the words "Liberty or Death", and one of the twenty secretly manufactured cherry-tree cannons. These home-made artillery pieces were made from the only suitable locally available wood, that of the cherry tree, and cauldrons traditionally used for the distillation of rose oil were melted down in order to provide the copper lining of the barrels. Todor Kableshkov was born in 1854. He studied French in Constantinople before catching malaria and returning home, where he met the leader of the revolutionary movement in Bulgaria - Vassil Levski and began his revolutionary career. Captured near Troyan after the April rising, he managed to kill himself with a police revolver in Gabrovo.

## 45. The National Revival in Bulgaria

In the middle of the 17th century the feudal Ottoman empire, incapable of reforming itself in the spirit of the new times, sank into a deep economic and social crisis which was never overcome. The decline of the Ottoman Turkish state was one of the strongest incentives for the economic upsurge of the Bulgarian people. Exempted from participation in the imperial armies, the Bulgarians did not suffer great losses of manpower and gradually, especially after the plague epidemics the Bulgarian Christian population considerably outnumbered the Muslims in the whole of the country. In some towns the Turkish population was represented only by the families of the local administration.

In the new conditions the enterprising Bulgarians, quite unexpectedly, turned out to be much better off than the sparse Muslims. Slowly but steadily craft manufacture passed into the hands of the Bulgarians. Crafts industry was reorganized on a new basis. The economic development speeded up after the Crimean War when Turkey's French and British allies demanded that the Ottoman empire should be opened up to western European trade. The Ottomans were forced to grant extensive privileges to craftsmen as a class, and to allow their organizations self-government. A great part of the Bulgarian peasant craftsmen settled in the towns, where they became independent, defended by their guilds.

International trade was chiefly carried out by Bulgarian merchants whose newly accumulated capital was invested in the expansion and modernization of their enterprises. Bulgaria began to export wool, cotton, hides, cloth and foodstuffs. Bulgarian merchants took their goods to the markets of Europe and Asia. Regions with extensive sheep-breeding developed crafts such as weaving, tailoring and skin-tanning. A large number of places in the Sredna Gora and the Balkan

Mountains became flourishing centres of crafts industry. The first factories were established in the 1830s.

Upon the official abolition of the feudal system of land ownership, the bourgeois style of production penetrated in agriculture too. The peasants started buying their land back from the Ottoman authorities or from Muslims nearly ruined and got down to organizing prosperous private farms. Big farms called “chifliks” occupied themselves with wholesale food production. Toward the end of the Ottoman rule the “chifliks” comprised about 25 per cent of the Bulgarian land and of the total agricultural produce.

The intensive economic relations within the country, the influence of the advanced, free nations, along with the interests of the newly created middle class, revived the national consciousness of the Bulgarian people. In the 18th and the 19th centuries Turkey was defeated by Russia several times. The thought that Turkey could be beaten raised Bulgarian hopes for liberation. The Bulgarians from all walks of life were interested in restoring the country's independence and building up a modern Bulgarian state.

The struggle for national liberation flared up with two parallel actions launched almost at the same time - the movement for national enlightenment and for independent Bulgarian Church.

Protests against the Greek Patriarchate, whose policy was one of assimilation (it controlled all ecclesiastical affairs in the country and ran most of the schools as well), boiled down to requests for the replacement of the Greek priests with Bulgarian ones and for the use of Bulgarian language in church services. The Patriarchate in Constantinople was relentless, a fact which made Bulgarian people claim full independence of the Bulgarian Church. Riots, in which the local Greek priests were chased out of town, were a popular feature of mid-nineteen century life. In Constantinople, a national centre took shape around the Bulgarian community attracting eminent writers and public figures. The centre took up the leadership of Church Independence struggle. On April 3rd, 1860, during Easter Sunday service in Constantinople, the Bulgarian bishop Illarion of Makariopol expressed the will of the whole Bulgarian people by solemnly proclaiming the separation of the Bulgarian Church from the Patriarchate

in Constantinople. However, the campaign for church autonomy continued for another 10 years and was finally rewarded in 1870, when a decree of the Sultan permitted the foundation of the Bulgarian Exarchate - a stunning success which encouraged the Bulgarians to extend their struggle further into the political sphere.

The most important event which dates the beginning of National Revival of Bulgaria is the writing of the Slav-Bulgarian History by the monk Paisii in the year 1762. It is one of the most celebrated works of all Bulgarian literature. Circulated in manuscript form, it was a book which inspired generations of patriots and became the spiritual cornerstone of the Bulgarian Renaissance. There is nothing extraordinary in the fact that the prophet of the Renaissance should be a monk. It was in the monasteries that the written Bulgarian language and its literature were kept alive. In their libraries the precious old Slavonic manuscripts were preserved and carefully copied by the monks, who also compiled anthologies and composed new works. In the monastery schools monks, aspiring priests and even lay people learnt to read and write in Slavonic, and in the monastery churches the Slavonic liturgy was in regular use. There were about one hundred such monasteries and of these the most important were the Rila monastery in Bulgaria and the Zografski and Hilendar monasteries on Mount Athos in Greece.

Sofronii Vrachanski, or to give him his secular name, Stoiko Vladislavov, was another great figure of the Bulgarian Renaissance who drew his inspiration from Paisii. Sometime between 1770 and 1774 he acted both as a priest and a teacher. He gradually introduced the use of Bulgarian in place of Greek in his little school in the town of Kotel, a cause to which he devoted twenty years of his life.

In the years following the Crimean War a nationwide wave of cultural activities overflowed the country. The first Bulgarian school was started in Gabrovo in 1835, followed by many others until there were few sizeable villages without a school. In many cases the teachers in the Bulgarian schools were supporters of the Revolutionary Movement and the schools were therefore cradles of national consciousness. In addition, "chitalishta" or "reading rooms" were established with the aim to fight illiteracy among adults. The first Bulgarian newspapers and periodicals also appeared at that period. The first

Bulgarian poem, Naiden Gerov's "Stoyan and Rada" was published in Odessa in 1845. The real father of modern Bulgarian verse P. R. Slaveikov of Tarnovo, whose works included humorous, patriotic and love poems and fables, also lived and worked at that time. Two other writers, who, though best known for their prose, were also poets, were Lyuben Karavelov and Ivan Vazov. The latter began writing verse under the influence of Pushkin and Lermontov. His most famous work is the novel "Under the Yoke", which has been translated into many languages and has also been filmed. By far the greatest poet of the period was the revolutionary Hristo Botev. The first real Bulgarian playwright was Vassil Drumev. His historical drama "Ivanko, Assassin of Assen", appeared in 1872, and is still performed. Undoubtedly, the finest pre-Liberation prose writer was Lyuben Karavelov, whose stories confirmed the realistic, humanistic trend of Bulgarian literature.

Art, in general, which appeared during the National Revival Period differed considerably from the mediaeval one, but it was nevertheless rooted in it.

During the 19th century Bulgarian painting broke free from the traditions of Byzantium as a result of its exposure to the all pervasive influence of West European and Russian painting. An increase in church building led to the flowering of ecclesiastical painting. Three schools of icon-painting were founded, the most celebrated of which was the Samokov school. Its most famous representative was Zakhari Zograf, some of whose most interesting icons can be seen at the Preobrazhenski monastery near Tarnovo, and at the Bachkovo and Rila monasteries. Even in his religious paintings there are true-to-life elements. For example, in his fresco of the Last Judgement at the Bachkovo monastery, he painted the portraits of some rich people from Plovdiv among sinners, and dressed some of the adulteresses in the fashion of the day. Zakhari Zograf painted a number of fine portraits and landscapes working with watercolours on paper and oils on canvas. This is how we got the portrait of the enlightener and spiritual giant of the Bulgarians - Neophit Rilski, his self-portrait and the portrait of Christiania. His nephew, Stanislav Dospevski, was one of Bulgaria's finest portrait painters of the period. He studied in Russia and was therefore much influenced by Russian art. Although his works

include icons as well as portraits and landscapes, he represents a step forward in the development of secular art. Among his most valuable works are the portraits of SS Cyril and Methodius, portraits of his contemporaries and a few historical scenes.

Another very influential painter of the period was Nikolai Pavlovich. Some of his most renowned pictures are scenes from Bulgarian history, including "Khan Asparoukh crossing the Danube", "Khan Kroum sacrificing before the walls of Constantinople" and others. He was the first Bulgarian artist to see the important role that art could play in the education of younger generations, and appealed for art to be included in the curricular of the schools.

The landscape came to life, first as the background scenery in icons and frescoes, and then as a separate art with its own merits. Worth mentioning is Dimiter Radoikov's "Rila Landscape".

New multi-figural compositions appeared devoid of biblical connotations, bustling with every day human activities, spontaneous human reactions and popular characters and attire. "The Horo Dance from Samokov" by Nikola Obrazopisov is a good example of early secular art.

Bulgarian Revival architecture represented a mixture of building traditions with skilfully introduced new elements borrowed from other countries. The master builders of those times were self-taught architects who considered architecture not merely a technical skill but above all an expression of their own way of thinking, their imagination and national belonging. The buildings created by them were real masterpieces - clocktowers, schools, churches and private houses. One of the most renowned master builders of the period was Nikola Fichev of Dryanovo who was responsible for the construction of many private and public buildings in Northern Bulgaria. Among his finest works are the Covered Bridge in Lovech, the bridge over the Yantra in Byala and various buildings in Tarnovo, including the Inn of Hadzhi Nikoli.

Now that there were no longer strict restrictions or prohibitions against church building, many large churches were built, including the church in Pazardzhik, the church of St. Nedelya in Sofia, the churches of a number of monasteries. The brightest jewel of the Renaissance architecture is undoubtedly, the Rila monastery, rebuilt in 1834-37

after it had been almost totally destroyed by fire in 1833. The economic boom characteristic of the 18th century brought about new consciousness in Bulgarian craftsmen, merchants and industrialists. Their prosperity and a new social status changed their mode of life. The commercial relations with other countries and their contacts with other European cultures helped them acquire new habits and a more universal outlook, which had an effect upon the building activities and most of all upon the construction of new, improved types of houses. The look of the towns in Bulgaria changed. The features of a local architectural Baroque appeared. The purely wooden structures, which made such a gloomy impression on travellers in the 16th century disappeared entirely. The Bulgarian asymmetrical house became the main element of town architecture. The monuments of architecture dating from that period fall into 3 categories:

1. Early Renaissance house - built in the 18th c.
2. Typical Renaissance house - built from the middle of the 18th until the middle of the 19th centuries.
3. Late Renaissance house - built in the second half of the 19th c. with features as follows:
  - a) with an open upper verandah
  - b) with a closed parlour and an inner staircase;
  - c) with shops on the ground floor;
  - d) with foreign architectural elements.

In some mountain settlements where wool production and processing were developed, the planning and floor space of the houses changed to accommodate the increasing production. In houses where coarse woollen cloths and galloons were woven, an upper verandah was built, while the courtyard was used for washing, drying, spinning and dying of the wool. The house owners decorated the interior in a very good taste and especially the parlour which served as a meeting place for business talks. For the needs of trading the houses on the main street had an uncovered verandah on the ground floor facing the street, with a workshop on one side, a grocer's shop on the other and a big store room at the back.

A typical feature of the highland houses is their solid, stone structure. This is not so much because of the cold mountain climate,

but rather because of the need for a solid dwelling place which would safeguard the life and property of its owners.

## **46. Bulgarian Applied Art**

The art of the Bulgarian people has for centuries preserved and developed the cultural contributions of its constituent ethnic groups. The Thracians introduced skills in gold and silver work, pottery, weaving and embroidery. The Slavic tribes contributed their experience in working wood and textiles. The Proto-Bulgarians came with rich traditions in the artistic working of hides, metals, cloth and stone. Many original works in jewellery, ceramics, masonry, and carving appeared between the 7th and the 14th centuries, that is, in the time of the First and Second Bulgarian States.

During the next five centuries, despite the Ottoman rule the Bulgarian nation continued to preserve its traditions. Radical changes in social life started making their appearance at the turn of the 18th century. As a result of the disintegration of Turkish feudalism and the new renaissance ideas widespread in Europe, new social forces established themselves in the economically expanding urban centres. They gave rise to condition for intensive cultural life and art based on new aesthetic principles. The material and intellectual upsurge of the Bulgarians was reflected in the traditional national art.

Bulgaria is rich in deposits of good-quality clays. For this reason ceramics have been a highly refined art since ancient times. Worthy of note are the 9th and 10th century faience pottery and the Tarnovo sgraffito pottery of the 14th century. During the first centuries of Turkish Domination this traditional craft died down, but gradually revived and during the National Revival Period flourished anew. Ceramics from such famous centres as Troyan, Brousartsi, Berkovitsa, Sofia and Samokov could be found at all trade fairs and markets. The aesthetic principle of the Bulgarian masters stemmed from the admiration of nature, and was expressed in the attempt to resemble it. This approach determined the shape, the use of colours and the decoration

scheme. The most typical shape of Bulgarian pottery is the jug, with an elongated, delicate neck, its top glazed in yellow and green. Flat brandy bottles are also popular. Etching or the circular drawing-out of straight lines was the usual method of decoration used up to the 19th century. In more recent times it has been replaced by painting with colour.

Wood-carving is another craft of applied and artistic nature which has a long-standing tradition in Bulgaria. Among the Bulgarians, it is considered a purely male craft, and there are two main types of execution - small-surface and large deep wood-cuts. Deep fretwork is linked with the architecture of royal and boyars' palaces of the 9th century. Magnificent carved church doors, stalls and interior decorations have been preserved from the Middle Ages. During the National Revival Period wood-carving flourished and official schools of woodcarvers were established: the Tryavna, Debur, Samokov and Bansko schools. They produced excellent craftsmen who continued a tradition which had previously been expressed in stone. The wood was turned into delightful flowers, twigs, birds and human figures interwoven in complex Biblical compositions. Each school of carving developed its own style. Characteristic features of the Bansko technique are lace-like background interwoven with vegetable patterns, human and animal figures. Typical of the Debur school of carving are high-relief, smaller human and animal figures in groups, surrounded by a general composition of larger branches, leaves and flowers. High-relief, interwoven patterns of flowers, fruits, wheat ears and birds were most favoured by the representatives of the Tryavna school. Patterns of vines and roses characterize the works of masters from the Samokov school. Masterpieces of woodcarving are the intricate iconostases in some churches (Rila Monastery, the Church of the Assumption in Pazardzhik, the Church of St. Marina and the Church of SS Constantine and Helena in Plovdiv and the Church of the Virgin in Samokov). The finest product of the Debur school is the walnut iconostasis in the Church of the Assumption in Pazardzhik whose craftsmen endeavoured to show the psychological relationship between human figures rather than fill the icon screen with plant and animal motifs in the manner of the Samokov woodcarvers. The latter

are responsible for the carving of the splendid iconostasis in the Principal Church at the Rila Monastery. This huge walnut structure, 11 metres high and 10 m wide was ordered in 1839 and took 5 years to complete. Later it was gilded and 16 kg of gold were used for the purpose.

The 19th century also saw the development of wood-carving in the Bulgarian home. Ceilings, doors, panels, fitted cupboards, chests and ballustrades were beautifully carved. Some of the panelled ceilings contained in the houses preserved from that period are really superb. Sun motifs made from walnut wood, with fretted rays inlaid within a frame decorated with floral and bird shapes is the dominating theme.

Craftsmen working in iron, copper, gold and silver had their heyday during the 18th-19th centuries when methods of decoration became more numerous. The artefacts were intended to meet the increased demand for handworked items by Christian Church (crosses, Bible bindings, icons, icon lamps, candlesticks, cups) as well as for the household, agriculture, hunting, fishing and wood-working. The wrought iron and copper vessels are a combination of skilful use of different techniques: beating, deep and shallow engraving, relief, open work and incrustation. The artisans' preference for pure forms is explicit in the objects for the household - coffee pots, trays, cauldrons and dishes. The extravagant decoration with geometrical, floral and animal figures retains the symbolism of ancient metal-work and Old Bulgarian forms and ornaments in which one can also find some influence of the Orient and Asia Minor. Today the talented successors of the old smiths are continuing to develop the traditions of the centuries.

Having inherited the rich traditions of the Thracians, the Bulgarian goldsmithery attained a perfection of the form and an exquisite finish mainly by means of granulation, filigree and the combination of the two (between the 16th and 19th centuries). Although this art was subjected to outside influence - particularly that of West European Baroque - the plant and geometric ornament, as well as the composition retain their national characteristics. The Period of the National Revival greatly stimulated the development of the goldsmith's craft. Big centres with clearly discernible local styles devel-

oped in places like Vidin, Chiprovtsi, Panagjurishte, Plovdiv, Sofia, Vratsa and Koprivshtitsa. It is hard to describe the great variety of wrought, engraved, enamelled, incrusted or filigreed earrings, bracelets, pendants, clasps, rings, hair-pins and other trinkets. Folk style trinkets, worn in the past as magical and Christian amulets, have not lost their aesthetic attraction to this day.

In the past stock-breeding was the principal livelihood for the rural population in many parts of the country. The abundance of high-quality wool favoured the general development of weaving, embroidery and knitting. Sheep's and goat's wool was used with its wide range of natural colours. Large centres for carpet-making were established during the National Revival Period - Kotel, Chiprovtsi, Samokov, and Panagjurishte. It is difficult to encompass the decorative diversity of the Bulgarian carpet, but on the whole, the Kotel carpet features large and orderly patterns, while Chiprovtsi carpets tend to have small patterns. The rugs are fleecy, with woollen tassels brought out on one side. The rugs from the Rhodope mountains are woven in wide strips of white, brown and yellow, their long woollen fringes softening the contour and adding warmth to the decoration. Rugs with short fringes were known in the Balkan Peninsula as "Yambolii" after the name of the Bulgarian town of Yambol where they were made. They feature large patterns and contrasting colours on a white background.

Until the beginning of the 20th century embroidery was associated exclusively with clothing. The oldest preserved embroidery dates from the second half of the 19th century: in its rich ornamentation one can find traces of the complex ethnic origin of the Bulgarians and the creative capacity inherent in all Bulgarian women. The structure of the wool, hemp and cotton fabrics woven by the women determined to a large extent the variety of stitches (in Samokov alone there were 24 types), which were made with homespun woollen or silk threads, the threads being counted out on the reverse side. This technique explains the preference for plant and geometric patterns. The artistic effect of the embroidery is achieved through the interplay of colours, ranging from the soft shades of autumn gold to the dark infusion of walnut leaves, from pale to bright colour combinations. Still, the red always prevails. Modern embroidery has preserved the exquisite beauty of the

patterns and is an expression of the artistic taste and skills of the Bulgarian woman.

In its centuries of historical development the Bulgarian applied art has fulfilled important social, artistic, aesthetic and educational tasks. Still living today, it is the basis on which our present-day art and culture has been built up.

## 47. Gabrovo and the Ettar Complex

People in every country tell jokes about the miserliness of a particular community and in Bulgaria the butt of the gags is Gabrovo. It is famous as the rival to Aberdeen as the world's thriftiest city. According to the jokes, the Gabrovians invented the one-stotinka coin, gliding, short skirts, narrow trousers and matchboxes with only one side for striking. They stop their clocks at night and carry their shoes to reduce wear and tear. They let a cat down a chimney rather than hire a sweep and dock the tails of these luckless creatures so they can shut the door a fraction sooner, conserving warmth. One Gabrovian says to another, "Whenever I see you I immediately think of Ivan. "Why?" "Because he owes me 1000 levs, too." The son of a Gabrovian wanted to become a doctor. "You fool", his father scolded him. "Better study dentistry. Man has got one heart but 32 teeth." "Another Gabrovian thinks, "Hmm. Ivan has been put on a diet... We can invite him to dinner."

The local people obviously relish this reputation and with their legendary skill for profit making have turned wit into an industry. The town now attracts hundreds of visitors every year to its "Louvre of Laughter", the House of Humour and Satire, opened on April Fool's Day 1974 on the initiative of Stefan Furtunov - the man also responsible for twinning Gabrovo with Aberdeen. Gabrovian jollity reaches a climax in May every odd numbered year, when masked carnivals, folk music, pop, Dixieland jazz, comedy films, animated cartoons, prize-givings and the ritual "cutting off the Gabrovian cat's tail" enliven the town during the Biennial Festival of Humour and Satire.

The House of Humour and Satire houses a collection of more than 100 000 cartoons, humorous writings and photos, carnival masks and costumes drawn from a number of countries across the world. The exhibits are changed regularly and the most interesting of them appear

in A PROPOS magazine, published in several languages twice a year. The museum is also home to Gabrovo's Experimental Satirical Theatre, a cabaret centre occasionally showing films and videos, which opened in 1985.

The oldest quarters of the town covering both banks of the River Yantra beyond the Igoto Bridge are its nicest part. A statue of Gabrovo's legendary 16th century founder, Racho the Blacksmith, stands on a rock in midstream. According to the legend Racho's workshop was on the banks of the river under hornbeam trees, which gave the town its name ("gabar" is the Bulgarian for "hornbeam").

Actually, the site of Gabrovo, which is situated on the northern slopes of the Balkan Range has been inhabited since Mid Paleolithic Period that is one hundred thousand years B. C. A rich heritage of tools, hunting weapons and primitive works of art bear witness to the way of life of prehistoric man. Here archaeologists have found traces not only of the later Thracian settlers, but also settlements of the Roman and Byzantine periods. In medieval Bulgaria, Gabrovo was a centre of trade, arts and crafts. Fortresses were built along the folds of the mountains to help protect the town, surrounded as it was by dense, wild forests. During the Russo-Turkish War of 1877-78 the liberating soldiers passed through Gabrovo on their way to the epic battle of Mount Stoletov, where Russian troops helped by Bulgarian volunteers rebuffed the Ottoman invaders.

The Historical Museum displays the results of a dig carried out at nearby Gradishte in the 1920s, the site of both Thracian and medieval Bulgarian fortresses. Finds include functional Thracian pottery and a suit of medieval chain armour.

Since Racho the Blacksmith set up his smithy beneath the hornbeams Gabrovo has been a crafts centre, gaining fresh impetus at the beginning of the 19th century when waterwheels were introduced from Transylvania. By 1870 the town had more than 800 workshops powered by water, making iron and wooden implements, clothing, and blankets sold beyond the frontiers of the Ottoman empire; today it produces textiles in quantities exceeded only by Sliven (a town in Bourgas district) and half the leather goods in Bulgaria. This fact has earned Gabrovo the nickname of the "Manchester of Bulgaria."

In the period of the National Revival Gabrovo was a flourishing centre of education and culture. Ardent patriots, most Gabrovian merchants made donations to stimulate the town's cultural development. Most important were the funds provided by the merchants Aprilov and Palauzov which helped the construction of the first modern school, known as the Aprilov School. It was built in 1835 by Nikola Fichev. Previously there had been monastery schools where some religious instruction was given in Church-Slavonic. There were some secular Greek schools, attended by the sons of Bulgarian merchants and craftsmen, but the pupils there were indoctrinated and started to feel Greek. It was Vasil Aprilov who devoted time, money and strength to the establishment of modern Bulgarian schools and the diffusion of Bulgarian national culture. He was aided in this noble enterprise by other patriots. A number of Bulgarian boys were also sent to Russia to complete their studies.

The Aprilov School today houses the National Museum of Education. The first two floors are dedicated to the civilizing mission of the medieval Bulgarian state - bearer of the new Slavic alphabet developed by SS Cyril and Methodius. Upstairs there are a series of reconstructed 19th century schoolrooms showing the trays of sand which, in the absence of slates, were used by the pupils for writing on.

Other sights from the period of the National Revival include the Clock Tower (1835), whose clock-work came from Vienna. It was built by the local population in the very centre of Gabrovo as a symbol of the increasing national consciousness of the Bulgarians in the last years of the Ottoman domination. The Old Street Fountain (1762), the Church of the Virgin (1865) and the Baev Bridge (1885) reflect the spirit of the time, too.

Another tourist sight is the Dechkov House built in 1835 by one of the most influential men in the town - Dechko. The house was later turned into school for girls and during the Russo-Turkish War converted into hospital. Then until 1928 it was the municipality building and on February 10 1920 the First Gabrovo Commune was declared there. Today the building belongs to the Regional Historical Museum.

The industrial workers of Gabrovo opposed the pro-fascist governments before WW II and took an active part in the operations of

Resistance Movement during the war. A monument in the town's centre is dedicated to Mitko Palauzov, the youngest member of Resistance. He was killed at the age of 14 in action together with his mother in 1944.

Apart from the traditional textiles, modern Gabrovo produces machinery and electronics, machine tools, insulated cable and bathroom accessories.

### *The ETTAR Architectural and Ethnographic Complex*

Lying on both banks of a clear mountain stream - a tributary of the Yantra river, 9 km from the industrial town of Gabrovo is the only open-air museum in the country which still functions as a genuine Bulgarian 19th century mountain town. Its main purpose is to preserve local crafts and artistry as well as to show the industrial achievements and mode of life of people in Gabrovo District during the time of the Bulgarian National Revival.

Work on the museum began in the spring of 1963, on the initiative of a local enthusiast, Lazar Donkov by name. After long years of misunderstanding and opposition, he finally succeeded in convincing local authorities of the museum's importance. The builders gave it the name of Ettar - the oldest name of the Yantra river. The whole complex covers an area of 7 hectares, on which there are 46 buildings.

Three methods were used in building the museum:

1) Restoration of what had been found on the site (the fuller's mill, the small water mill)

2) Transportation of hydro-powered workshops and equipment from other villages in the region (wooden lathes, a saw mill, whetstones, blacksmith's, a shop where knives are produced etc.)

3) Reconstruction of shuttered workshops and houses after well-preserved blueprints and photos. ("Charshiya" the market street)

The Ettar complex falls into three sections.

The first contains workshops powered by water - a fulling mill, a water mill, a braid mill, a saw mill, a braiding room, lathes for wooden items and a mechanical whetstone are on show. Put into action, they clearly demonstrate the practical inventive mind of the high-lander. Excellent examples of handmade wooden objects can be found, with

intricate and elaborate patterns displaying the skill of the carver. An original lathe for making "gavanki" (round wooden boxes), and another for "bukletsi" (wine flagons) can be seen.

The second section is a reconstructed bazaar of the type once common in Bulgarian towns where crafts workshops were inseparable from the "charshiya" (the market place). This section forms the heart of the complex. During the day artisans are at work here, hammering bells, throwing pots, sewing braid and sheepskin jackets and so on. It is possible for visitors to sign up for crafts courses. The trainees are expected to learn the rudiments of copper working, rug weaving, pottery, tailoring, flute making, forging and woodcarving for thirty hours spread over one week. Even if your interest in crafts is minimal, it is difficult not to admire the work of the craftsmen. The potter is bent over his wheel shaping the clay by hand, painting and decorating the pots with intricate motifs. Then he glazes the pots, fires them a second time in the kiln until it is finally ready and pleasing to the eye. Pots of different sizes, jugs, pitchers, plates and saucers, coloured mostly in yellow and green, according to the local fashion, are beautifully arranged on shelves or in the shop windows.

On both sides of the market street are the workshops of craftsmen working with metals - blacksmith's, coppersmith's and jeweller's. It is a real pleasure to sit on the verandah of the coffee-shop, sip sweet Turkish coffee and listen to the sound of the smith's hammer.

The little shops are stocked with souvenirs: wooden objects, copper utensils, wrought-iron candlesticks, earthenware pots, gold and silver jewellery, brightly-coloured rugs, garments made of fur and leather, folk musical instruments, knitting, embroidered tablecloths and napkins, dolls in national costumes and a variety of other goods. Pride of place is the bakery where you can buy a "simitli" (a glazed bun made of chick-pea flour) or some other typical Bulgarian snack.

The houses are built in the style of the National Revival Period. Among them is a two-storeyed house with a tavern on the ground floor (on your right as you enter the complex) which doesn't have a single nail in it. The wooden parts are fitted together with the aid of wooden pegs. The floors of the houses are covered with the gaily coloured striped rugs of the region, and on the shelves running around the rooms

the copper dishes glitter in the sunshine.

Several fountains, two arched bridges and a clocktower, all showing the art of the local masons, have also found place in the complex.

A third section, intended to show village life, is still being constructed.

## **48. Kotel**

The small town is situated on the southern slopes of the eastern Balkan Range, about 30 km from the industrial and tourist centre of Sliven. It is not only picturesquely sited but also has an interesting past. The name of the town means “cauldron” because of the springs that bubble nearby. It was founded in the 16th century by settlers from the village of Novachka, who sought refuge from the plains where the Ottomans dominated. Legend has it that the newcomers lost their horses and later found them grazing by the springs beside the future settlement. They liked the place and built their houses here. Soon they found out that the best girls began to disappear, perhaps kidnapped by dragons living near the spring. That made them move the village to its present site, a little farther from the springs.

The Kotel surroundings are thought to have been the scene of the battle between the Bulgarian Khan Kroum and the Byzantine Emperor Nicephorus in the year 811, which ended with Kroum's victory. Later, in 1280, the Bulgarian Tzar Ivailo defeated the Byzantine commander Murin and his 10 000 strong army.

Kotel was another of the highland towns where Bulgarian customs and crafts survived centuries of Turkish rule. During the 18th and 19th centuries the village became richer because of the well developed sheep breeding. The villagers had about 450,000 sheep and thus the town became a centre of home weaving. The wool trade grew rapidly, too. The wool was bought by foreign merchants from France, Italy, and Austria. What was left was used by the local craftsmen for making clothes, rugs, and carpets. These were sold on the markets of the Ottoman Empire. The dealers of Kotel opened offices in many towns: Varna, Balchik, Istanbul, etc. Besides, Kotel was also one of the “soldiers' villages”, which gave it privileges that speeded its development.

The economic and cultural advance favourably influenced

building activities. The old one-storeyed plank houses were replaced by two-storeyed ones with shops and store-rooms on the ground floor, halls and rooms on the upper one. Public buildings, monasteries, schools, were also erected, usually built of timber and decorated with wood-carvings. Although destroyed by three fires, especially by the disastrous one of 1894, the central quarter was spared and later became the subject of 20th-century preservation orders.

Kotel is the birthplace of many Bulgarian enlighteners, men of letters, and revolutionaries - more than 120 prominent National Revival figures lived and worked here. It was here that Paisii, a monk from Mount Athos monastery of Khilendar, first left his "Slav-Bulgarian History" to be read and copied. It was also here that its first hand copy was made by Sophronius of Vratsa in 1765. Dr Peter Beron created the first Bulgarian primer here. Kotel was also the birthplace of Neophyt Bozveli, who was the first to win the struggle for an independent Bulgarian church. The name of Kotel is connected with the name of the patriarch of the Bulgarian revolution G. S. Rakovski, and many others.

In the 20th century Kotel somewhat declined. In fact, in the 19th century it had more inhabitants than today, because many people left it to seek employment elsewhere.

However, the town's traditional industry has been kept alive. The local smooth-faced carpets are notable for their bold colours - usually red, blue or green with secondary use of scarlet, wine red, indigo, black, olive green or light blue. They often have lozenge - or diamond shaped geometrical patterns woven on primitive hand-drawn wooden looms. Tufted goat-hair "guberi" with simpler patterns are also made here.

The visitors to Kotel are often charmed by its wooden houses of different volumes and plans. They all create the impression of lightness because they are held together by wedges, dowels, and tenons without a single nail. The houses from the Early and High Revival are two-storeyed with an open ground floor and a hall flanked by two rooms on the upper storey. The houses from the Late Revival, built from the middle of the 19th century to the Liberation from Ottoman domination in 1878, are very wide-spread. There is a trend to symmetry in their plan-

ning schemes. The windows are framed and sometimes have triangular pediments. They have carved wooden ceilings, built-in cupboards and spiral staircases.

An interesting example is the house of Kyorpeev. It is situated in a picturesque street among other houses. It was built in the middle of the 19th century and has a symmetrical plan. The small yard is laid with stone flags. The two timber-built upper storeys project one above the other and rest on the stone-built and plastered ground floor. The walls of the upper storeys are pinewood planked and have decorative pilasters at the corners.

The transition between the projecting storeys is effected by a concave timber moulding. The window frames are richly decorated and end in triangular pediments. The structure is crowned on three sides by a wide eave faced from below.

A pair of semicircular steps and high wooden stairs lead through a double-winged door into a small entrance hall and into the ground floor hall. The hall is flanked by two small rooms, both having cupboards, a fire-place, and a mensofa. There is another larger room, probably used for receiving guests. There are three flights of stairs at the one end of the hall: one leads to the cellar, the other two lead to the second floor. The two upper floors have the same plans. The hall of the storey goes the whole depth of the building and ends in a bay with tri-lateral bay-windows.

Today past and present live together. The town has grown and many modern public buildings and dwellings have been erected. The town has a flagstoned square, where the Pantheon of G. S. Rakovski was built to commemorate the Bulgarians who sacrificed their lives for our liberation. It houses the bones of the great revolutionary.

The people of Kotel produce furniture, carpets, upholstery. These are well received both home and abroad. The town has a school of music where the playing of traditional instruments is taught. There is also a woodcarving school. The town's History Museum is housed in the timber school-house of 1869 and contains momentos of Dr Peter Beron. You can also visit the plain 19th - century church of the Holy Trinity, the Church of SS Pater and Paul, the Ethnographic Museum and the Museum of Natural History.

Nowadays, Kotel is well developing as a resort because of its clean and fresh air, spring water and beautiful surroundings. The town has two hotels. You can find rest and delicious local dishes in the Tavern, the Diavena Restaurant ant Bar, and the Izvorite (the Springs) Restaurant in the park.

#### **49. Zheravna**

In the eastern part of the Balkan Range, there are a number of small villages and towns such as Gradets, Medven, Ichera, Zheravna, Kotel and others, rich in original old architecture and also known to Bulgarian history for a number of eminent figures in the Bulgarian Revival and Liberation movements.

The village of Zheravna is situated on two rather low hills below the mount of Razboina, some 14 km south of Kotel. Its setting is really picturesque: fertile fields and vast pastures spread out to the south of the village, while to the north the oak and beech-wooded slopes of the Balkan Range rise.

Zheravna is said to have been founded by Bulgarians who sought refuge in the mountains after Bulgaria had fallen to the Turks. Its name comes from the old Bulgarian word for water mill.

During the time of the Turkish domination, the village had some privileges: Turks were not allowed to settle here; they had no right to stay overnight or pass through on horseback; the land belonged to the villagers, who in return were recruited by the Turkish army. Actually, Zheravna was one of the “soldiers’ villages”.

The population of Zheravna was mainly engaged in cattle and sheep-breeding, carried out on a large scale. Graft industry developed quickly. Home-spun tailoring of woolen clothes also flourished. The local craftsmen and merchants opened shops in the large towns along the Danube and in Istanbul. They also established steady trade links with central Europe and Russia. This was the reason why this rich village was called “Little Plovdiv” by the Turks.

During the National Revival period of the 18th and 19th centuries, Zheravna turned into a literary, educational, and cultural centre. Famous Revival men-of letters and scholars lived and worked here. The village was visited by Father Paisii, whose “Slav-Bulgarian

History" was copied here in script. Later, other prominent men such as Raino Popovich and Sava Filaretov, the revolutionary Todor Ikonomov, as well as the great Bulgarian short story writer Yordan Yovkov, enriched our literature and history.

In the 19th century, being a centre of the struggle for liberation from the Ottoman domination, Zheravna was visited by the organizers of the National Revolution G. S. Rakovski, Vassil Levski and Angel Kunchev. The local people took an active part in the struggle and in the April Uprising.

Nowadays, Zheravna is a monumental architectural reserve where more than 200 typically local timber houses have been preserved. The most characteristic feature of the Bulgarian towns and villages during the National Revival period is their picturesqueness, and the Zheravna houses also show an exceptional richness and variety of architectural forms, which makes it possible to trace the origin and development of the timber house in these parts of Bulgaria.

The houses preserved here date mainly from the Revival period. The spirit of the time is reflected in their planning scheme and architecture. They can be divided chronologically, according to their development, into 2 main groups: 1. Pre-Revival houses, built up to the 17th century. They are usually one-storeyed timber houses with 2 rooms only. 2. Revival houses. This group can be subdivided into 3 other groups Early Revival houses, built in the early 18th century; High Revival houses, built from the middle of the 18th to the middle of the 19th century; and Late Revival houses, built in the second half of the 19th century.

The ZHERAVNA HOUSE usually comprises ground premises and the upper floor. Some of the roofs are stone-tiled. A stone staircase leads from the yard up to the verandah. From here through the narthex, you can walk to a room with a fire-place or enter directly the bedrooms. The furniture of the living-rooms consists of traditional window seats, built-in closets and a big fire-place at one of the walls. The rich interior decoration is combined with the split level floor. The upper level is railed and set aside for guests.

The houses are modest with smooth planking and broad, rounded eaves, The outer appearance does not give signs of the rich interior

wood-carved decoration which covers the ceilings. The wood-carvings represent the favourite fruit and flowers, a structural centre of an ornamented geometrical element which was very popular in the middle of the 19th century. Another important feature of the Revival house decoration is the wall painting, drawn in bright and daring colour combinations.

The houses, built before the end of the 17th century, reflect the Bulgarians' attitude towards the enslavers. These were hidden behind high walls, not allowing access to the building. Later, they began to be built near the street, with overhanging eaves, bay windows but still heavily shuttered windows. Their ground floor was made of stone, while the upper floor was whitewashed.

The old Zheravna houses are extremely appealing, however, there are some worth special mentioning. One of them is the house of the prominent figure in the Revival movement Sava Filaretov. It was built as early as the beginning of the 18th century in the middle of a large plot. It has a ground and an upper floor. The large ground floor is richly fitted with cupboards, a fire-place, an iconostasis, and two men-sofas, partitioned by a parapet and small columns. A wooden staircase leads to the upper verandah through a plank door with open-work carvings.

The so called "prust" had lost its original function as a household work-room and was turned into a home chapel. Its architectural design corresponds to its new function: the cubic space is covered with a raised vault, faced with small planks - a unique feature in Bulgarian dwelling architecture.

The architecture of the exterior, the wooden surfaces, tinted dark with the patina of time, the large eaves above, the modest details of the columns, all this makes of the structure a model example of a Zheravna house.

The house of Russi Chorbadzhi is another remarkable architectural monument, built towards the end of the 18th century in the centre of the village, deep inside the plot. The ground floor consists of a store room, a large room, and an open corner verandah. Wooden stairs lead to the large open verandah on the upper floor, which is raised in its southern part, thus forming an original bay illuminated to the south

through 3 wood-carved windows with shutters.

The two large rooms on the ground and on the upper floors are similar in their decoration: one of the inner walls has the fire-place, there are built-in cupboards, niches and a wood-carved iconostasis.

The verandah, which serves as an antechamber to the larger room and as a guest room, is also decorated with wood-carvings.

The iconostasis has been executed with special care. Branches and rosettes are interwoven with stylized plant ornaments in its open-work wood-carving.

The house Yordan Yovkov was born in is not only of historical significance as the birthplace of the great Bulgarian novelist and short story writer. Certain features of its architectural design, planning and decoration place it among the interesting examples of Early Revival buildings in Zheravna. It is situated on top of one of the hills on the outskirts of Zheravna, in a large yard behind strong walls and a thick plank door. It is a one-storeyed house with a once open porch, placed between the two rooms and the cellar at the back. The two rooms are similar in decoration and size. Fire-places flanked by built-in cupboards are built on the exterior stone walls. The mensofas (raised floor areas) are placed to the south, under the windows, which are grated from outside and with shutters inside. Shelves run all round the walls. There is a wooden carved iconostasis in one of the rooms. The house of Yordan Yovkov is notable for its original plan, modest exterior decoration and extraordinarily rich interior decoration for the time it was built.

There is another interesting building, erected in 1866-68, near St. Nikolai Church - the Class School. The structure has 2 storeys to the south and only one to the north because of the sloping ground. The ground floor is dug into the earth. There are two classrooms placed on either side of the entrance. There is a large rectangular hall which gives access to all the rooms on the upper floor. At the far end of the hall is the large school hall, where theatrical performances used to be given.

The exterior decoration is derived from local tradition. Built in the second half of the 19th century, it is influenced by the architecture of the Plovdiv type of house, developed at the same time. Much has been achieved by the two porticoes. The southern one, with 4 wooden

columns, supports the teachers' room on the second floor. It is crowned with a yoke-shaped pediment, which was typical of the Revival architecture. The western portico, though having no pediment, emphasizes the main entrance. The elevations, plastered white, framed at the corners with dark timber and pierced symmetrically by window openings, follow the pattern of the symmetrical Plovdiv house.

## **50. The Plain of Thrace and Plovdiv**

It is one of the largest in Bulgaria - its average width is 25 mls (40 km), its length is about 97 mls (160 km). Watered by the Maritsa and the numerous tributaries descending from the Balkans and the Rhodopes, the Thracian plain has been a fertile, productive land since antiquity. The ancient Greeks called it Upper or Northern Thrace to distinguish it from the lush plains on the far side of the Rhodopes in Greece and Turkey, collectively known as Thrace after the tribes who lived there. A Bulgarian legend has it that God, dividing the world among different peoples, forgot them until a delegation of Bulgars mentioned the oversight. God replied, "There's nothing left, but since you are hard-working folk I will give you a portion of Paradise." And so the Bulgarians received part of Thrace.

If the Balkan range was the cradle of the Bulgar state, then the fertile plain between The Sredna Gora and the Rhodope Mountains was the heartland of the Thracians who inhabited it some three thousand years ago. They left a large number of burial mounds and some other remains. They grew cereals, hemp, flax and vines. Homer called Thrace a country of fruitfulness with sheep which had fine fleece and horses which were swifter than the wind. The Roman poet Ovid sang of the river Hebros, which is the ancient name of Maritsa. Thrace was the magnet that drew conquerors like Philip of Macedon and the Romans, whose legacy to the present consists of the graceful ruins that embellish Plovdiv, Bulgaria's second city, and a fair rival to the capital in several respects. Plovdiv never fails to charm with its old quarter - a wonderful melange of Renaissance mansions, mosques and Roman remains, spread over three hills.

The climate of the plain is comparatively mild, because the Balkan range prevents the northern winds from penetrating to the plain while the warm Aegean air currents reach it through the valley of the

Maritsa. Winter is short and mild, summer is long and hot. Although the biggest Bulgarian river flows through the plain, the average rainfall is insufficient and vast areas have to be irrigated. The black soil of the plain is particularly good for growing wheat. Various other crops are grown here, such as maize, oats, barley, rice, sunflower, cotton, tobacco, peanuts, sesame, anise, tomatoes and peppers. There are fields of strawberries, vineyards, apple and peach orchards. Early vegetables are grown in a great number of hot-houses.

### *Plovdiv*

Plovdiv is the second largest town in Bulgaria not only because of its 360,000 inhabitants but also because of its economic and cultural importance. It is one of the most attractive and vibrant centres in the country. The town is picturesquely situated on both banks of the river Maritsa, among a number of rocky hills which rise unexpectedly from the middle of a vast flat plain.

Plovdiv has always been a beautiful city. Ancient chroniclers praised its beauty in their time. There is plenty to see in Plovdiv today: the old town embodies the town's long and varied history - Thracian fortifications, Roman walls and public buildings and impressive timber-framed Renaissance houses which look down on the Ottoman mosques and the artisans' dwellings of the lower town. But Plovdiv isn't only a parade of antiquities: the city's arts festivals and trade fairs rival even Sofia's in number.

Plovdiv has always been developing on a large scale. Its growth has been facilitated by its key position on important roads. It lies on the international Vienna-Belgrade-Sofia-Istanbul highway and is also on the Paris-Istanbul railway line. The economic growth of Plovdiv and especially the establishment of the Trade Fair made necessary the construction of a number of big hotels and public buildings.

Plovdiv is a university and cultural centre. Among its higher educational establishments are the Plovdiv University, the Medical school, the Institute of Food Technology, the Agricultural University, the Technical University and School of Music. There are also a number of research institutes in horticulture, food technology and tobacco production. Of the cultural institutions mention should be made of the

Art Gallery, the National Theatre, the Puppet Theatre, the National Opera, the Archaeological Museum, the Ethnographic Museum and many others.

Plovdiv is a large industrial centre. The largest enterprises comprise the non-ferrous metal works, the metal working plant and the textile combine. Other works produce typewriters, footwear, carpets, fur clothes and cosmetics. The foodstuffs industry is well developed. The largest establishments in this field are the sugar combine, the brewery & the cannery which produces tinned fruit and deep frozen vegetables and fruits. The "Rhodopi" cigarette factory produces cigarettes for the local market and for export.

Plovdiv is probably best known abroad for its International Trade Fair. The city became Bulgaria's principal marketplace during the 1870s, when the railway between Europe and Istanbul was completed and the great annual fair held in Uzundzhovo since the 16th century was moved here. Plovdiv's first international trade fair (1892) was a rather domestic affair - a man from the east of the country proposed to show his hunting dogs, while Bohemia exhibited beehives. The first large trade fair was held in 1933 with the participation of 424 Bulgarian industrial firms. In 1936 the fair became a member of the International Fairs Organization. The first International Trade Fair was established in the following year, 1937. Today, it is the largest of its kind in the Balkans. There are actually two annual fairs: the spring event, devoted to consumer goods in early May, and the larger autumn industrial fair, during the second half of September, both held at the complex on the north bank of the river. The complex contains a number of pavilions and exhibition rooms where Bulgarian and foreign firms display their goods, negotiate and sign contracts for future business contacts.

### *History*

Plovdiv is one of the oldest towns in the Balkan Peninsula. The hills were inhabited in prehistoric times.

The Thracian tribe of Obrysae fortified the hill of Nebet Tepe and the place was called Eumolpiade, after the legendary Thracian hero who first settled on one of the hills of Plovdiv.

In 342 B. C. Philip II of Macedon waged a campaign in which he defeated King Kersobleptes of the Odrysae and built several strongholds in the conquered lands. Initially, the town was little more than a military outpost designed to keep a watchful eye over the troublesome natives. The Greek writer Polybius wrote that King Philip V in a campaign across Central Thrace, attacked the Odrysae, the Bessi and the Dentels, reached Philippoe Polis and stationed a garrison there. Evidently, in the 2nd c. B. C. Plovdiv already bore the name of its conqueror and builder Philip. The Greek chronicles used two words to designate the city, and Claudius Ptolemy, the prominent geographer, was the first to unite them in Philippopolis. It was a rough frontier town which the Macedonians deliberately colonized with criminals and dropouts - Roman writer Pliny later identified Philippopolis with Poneropolis, the semi-legendary “City of the Thieves”. The Macedonians couldn’t, however, hold the town for very long. After the disintegration of the Macedonian state it became a Thracian town again. The Thracians translated the name Philippopolis into their own tongue - Pulpudeva.

In the 1st century A. D. the Romans occupied the Balkan Peninsula. The Emperor Claudius seized Philippopolis in 46 A. D. Thrace became a Roman province. In the 2nd century the Roman Emperor Marcus Aurelius fortified the three hills again. The town became a prosperous Roman city called Trimontium, meaning three hills. But the old name of Philippopolis was also used because the Greek language was predominant in this part of the Roman Empire. The town grew in size and spread onto the plain surrounding the hills. The Romans built a second city wall which included parts of the flat land and Sahat Tepe hill. Still later, in the 3rd century, the town spread to Dzhendem Tepe where a temple of Apollo was erected. The Roman town coincided approximately with the centre of present day Plovdiv. Remains of the Roman walls, a round tower and one of the city gates can be seen on Nebet Tepe hill. Other interesting architectural materials and sculptures are displayed in the Archaeological museum. The stadium, which could seat about 30,000, has been excavated on Stamboliiski Square.

After the disintegration of the Roman Empire, Plovdiv became

a Byzantine town. It was devastated by the Huns in 447. In the 6th century the Emperor Justinian rebuilt and refortified it. Later, although the town theoretically continued to belong to Byzantium, there were frequent Slav raids. By the seventh century, with the Danube frontier increasingly breached by barbarians, the city was in decline. With the arrival of the Proto-Bulgarians, Byzantine control over the area became increasingly tenuous. “Once upon a time”, lamented Byzantine chronicler Anna Comnena in the twelfth century, “Philippopolis must have been a large and beautiful city, but after the Tauri and Scyths (i. e. the Slavs) enslaved the inhabitants... it was reduced to the condition in which we see it.” In Comnena’s time Philipopolis was a notorious hotbed of heretics, a situation usually blamed on local Armenians, who migrated to Thrace en masse in the eighth and tenth centuries, bringing with them the dualistic doctrines of Manichaeanism and Paulicianism. Although these heresies eventually fizzled out, the Armenian population of Plovdiv has endured to this day.

In the 9th century the Bulgarians seized the town and held it for some time. The Slavs changed Pulpudeva into Pupuldin, Puldin and finally Plovdiv. In the 11th century Plovdiv once again came under the authority of Byzantium. At the time of the crusades Plovdiv had a mixed population consisting of Bulgarians, Greeks and Armenians. In 1096 the crusaders came to Thrace and were welcomed by the friendly population. But during the second crusade, led by Conrad III, they set fire to the commercial suburbs of Plovdiv and when later the army of the Third Crusade, led by Friedrich Barbarossa entered the city, its inhabitants fled away in the Rhodope mountains. After the Latin Empire was settled in Constantinople, Plovdiv was handed over to the knight Renier de Trit. The population gave him a friendly welcome, but later on; after the battle near Adrianople when Emperor Baldwin was defeated and captured by Tzar Kaloyan on 14 April 1205, certain political changes occurred. The Greeks and the Armenians, following the advice of the Bulgarians, decided to deliver Plovdiv to Kaloyan, and Renier de Trit took refuge in Stanimaka (now Assenovgrad). In the meantime Kaloyan’s victorious march was stopped below the walls of Saloniki and then the Greeks in Plovdiv surrendered to the local noble-

man - the Greek Alexis Aspietas. Then, during the autumn Kaloyan took the city, hanged Aspietas and annexed Philippopolis to the Bulgarian state, while Renier de Trit, besieged in Stanimaka, was freed in 1206 by a Latin detachment that came to his rescue. The successor of Baldwin, Henri, defeated Tzar Boril on 2 August 1206 near Plovdiv and Renier de Trit returned to the domain. After his death the city was owned by his relative the knight Gerard de Stroem and remained within the Latin Empire until 1235 when the Bulgarian Tzar Ivan Assen II conquered Philippopolis, and the city was finally joined to the Second Kingdom until its fall under Ottoman domination in 1370. No wonder that there are scarcely any remains from that period. It was not worth developing a site which was so fiercely disputed between Bulgarians and Byzantines. So Plovdiv was a rather run-down place when the Turks inherited it in the fourteenth century renaming it Filibe, a corruption from Philippopolis. It became the seat of the governor of Roumelia. Because of its situation on the main road from Asia Minor to Europe, the town soon recovered as a commercial centre, with a thriving Muslim quarter, complete with bazaars and mosques, growing up at the base of the hill where Plovdiv's Christian communities continued to live. Many of the latter were members of a rich mercantile class by the mid-nineteenth century, and they expressed their affluence in the construction of opulent town houses which showed the very best of native arts and crafts.

In the late 18th and early 19th centuries Plovdiv became an important centre of the Bulgarian National Revival. The citizens took an active part in the struggle for church independence from the Greek Patriarchate, and for independent Bulgarian schools and national culture. The first Bulgarian school was started in 1836 and Naiden Gerov established the classical school in 1850.

Plovdiv was liberated by the Russian Army in 1878 but under the Treaty of Berlin became the capital of the province of Eastern Roumelia, an Ottoman province administered by a Christian governor-general. Much of the Christian population, naturally, wanted union with the Principality of Bulgaria, which was finally attained in 1885. Plovdiv at last became a Bulgarian town again. The cultural life of the town flourished. Well-known writers such as Ivan Vazov, Konstantin

Velichkov, Zakhary Stoyanov and Petko Slaveikov and the artist Mrkvichka and Anton Mitov worked here. Plovdiv developed as an industrial centre too with a number of cigarette and textile factories, sugar refineries and flour mills.

Plovdiv has continued to rival Sofia as a cultural and business centre successfully, not least because of the prestigious international trade fairs held here in May and September. Close proximity to Turkey and Greece ensures that Plovdiv is well placed to take advantage of recent changes - and private enterprise seems to have taken root here more quickly than anywhere else in the country.

### *Sights*

#### Around Stamboliiski Square

The square is surrounded by small cafes packed with people.

The ruins of a Roman Stadium are visible in a pit beneath the square. They represent only a fragment of the original, horseshoe arena, where the Alexandrine games were held during the 2nd and 3rd centuries: as many as 30,000 spectators watched chariot races, wrestling, athletics and other events from the marble stands which once lined the slopes of the neighbouring heights.

Among the variously styled buildings around here, the Dzhumaya Dzhamiya or “Friday Mosque” with its diamond-patterned minaret and lead-sheathed domes, dominates the view. Its thick walls and the configuration of the prayer hall (divided by 4 columns into 9 squares) are typical of the so called “popular mosques” of the 14th and 15th centuries, although it is believed that the “Dzhumaya mosque” might actually date back to the reign of Sultan Murad II (1359-85). The mosque is remarkable for its size. Services are still held there. The mosque tends to be locked up outside prayer times, so you’ll have to time your visit carefully if you want to admire the fountain, the floral motifs, and the medallions bearing Koranic texts that adorn its interior.

Immediately northeast of the mosque lies the Bazaar Quarter, where narrow streets still bear the names of the trades that used to operate from here: for example, a name meaning the street of the iron-mongers or that of the weavers of the coarse woollen cloth which the

Plovdiv merchants bought from the Rhodope shepherds before reexporting it throughout the Levant. In the Ottoman times Plovdiv's main commercial district stretched from here northward to the Maritsa River. In the 16th century Arab traveller Evliyj Chelebi counted 880 shops raised "storey above storey". You won't find much of the area's former bazaar atmosphere these days - but it's a nice experience to wander along the street, shaded by red awnings.

We'll approach the old town from Stamboliiski Square, along Maksim Gorki street which gently runs upward into the old Plovdiv. Our first stop is the Danov House, a former residence of Bulgaria's first large-scale publisher and now home to a museum of Bulgarian painting. Danov was one of those eminent 19th-century Bulgarians who regarded distribution of the printed word as a patriotic duty: a crucial step in the people's struggle against 5 centuries of Ottoman darkness. As well as printing books he opened the country's first bookshops in Plovdiv and Rousse; made globes, thermometers and weighing scales (a selection of which are on display) for the nation's schools; and founded Plovdiv's first daily newspaper, Maritsa, in 1878 - a title resurrected in modern times after the changes of November 1989.

To the left of the house a staircase leads up to the church Church of the Virgin; an imposing building which holds some icons by the Samokov master Stanislav Dospevski. The church was built in 1844 on the site of a small church which previously stood here. It is a three-aisled structure without a dome. The iconostasis has an inscription by St. Dospevski. At first Greek priests officiated in this church; the first service in Bulgarian was held on 30 Nov 1859. The belfry which stands apart was erected in 1888 and has an inscription "In memory of the Liberators".

Continuing up Gorki Street we come to the Chomakov House, which is now an exhibition gallery devoted to the work of Zlatyu Boyadzhiev, one of post-war Bulgaria's best-loved painters. The walls of the house are now alive with compositions, inspired by countryside life and customs, and set amidst the generous nature of the Thracian plain. With irresistible appeal, the painter composed fantastic scenes made down-to-earth by ordinary human life; strange shapes of trees populated by unlikely birds; and people, a multitude of people, whom

Master Boyadzhiev knew in his native village of Brezovo or elsewhere during his long and fruitful lifetime.

Destiny was not too kind to this Plovdiv artist.

Born in Brezovo near Plovdiv in 1903, young Zlatyu did not obey his father's will to become a banker or a merchant but instead followed his inner urge to paint, and when he showed his early works in Italy he received unanimous praise. During the 30s and 40s Zlatyu was already established as one of Bulgaria's top painters. Hundreds of new pictures appeared one after the other at his exhibitions at home and abroad. Until the fateful year of 1951. A stroke caught him at work before his easel and left him almost totally crippled. His right hand hung limp. Practically speechless, moving about only with effort, the artist gradually made a remarkable comeback. He started painting with his left hand. Eventually it turned out a fresh beginning - a second "golden" period for Zlatyu (the name means golden in Bulgarian). It proved an unusually intensive and fruitful period. The hundreds of left-hand works were placed in the "golden fund" of Bulgarian art. In 1975 his hand dropped the brush forever; but his talent continues to shine through his works, especially those at the permanent exhibition in Old Plovdiv. Once you step inside, light envelopes you on all sides, you start living in his world, on an imaginary journey around the Thracian Plain, entering villages, where hospitable people make you feel welcomed. A little further on Gorki Street is the Museum of icons, rich in 15th and 16th century works rescued from the region's churches; next door to the walled Church of Saints Constantine and Helena. The site was previously occupied by a small church, near which stood the Kurshum Han (Inn), in which generations of Bulgarian merchants stayed on their way to Asia Minor, Rumania or Austria. The present church was built in 1834 with money collected by the tailors' guild of Plovdiv. The church is a three-aisled building, 66 feet long by 46 feet wide. The belfry stands 43 feet high. There is a fine gilded iconostasis by the sculptor Ivan Pashkula. Some of the icons were painted by Zakhari Zograf in 1836. The intricate floral patterns adorning the porch give way to a colourful interior, with brightly painted geometric design of the ceiling held aloft by pillars topped with Corinthian capitals. Scenes from the Gospels cover the surrounding walls. The iconos-

tasis represents an early Bulgarian specimen of the Baroque style.

The Balabanov House, once the home of merchant Luka Balabanov, is now the venue for modern art shows. Nearby, the curious permanent exhibition of Mexican art displays contemporary works by both Mexican and Bulgarian artists. On the same street the Hindlian House shelters some of Plovdiv's most sumptuous interiors. The Hindlians were Armenian merchants, and the a la franga decorations painted into the niches of upstairs rooms recall the mercantile cities in which they moved: Constantinople, Alexandria and Venice among them. A wide-ranging collection of furniture collected from the city's wealthy households fills much of the house, including a couple of Biedermeier-period sitting rooms packed with trinkets imported from Vienna. Downstairs, the Hindlian family bathroom is designed to look like a miniature hamam, complete with marble floor and fountain. Many of Plovdiv's surviving Armenian families still live in the surrounding streets.

Chomakov Street ascends northwards to the summit of the hill on which the old town was built, passing the town's most photographed building - the Kuyumdzhioglu House, which once belonged to Argir Kuyumdzhioglu, a rich merchant from Plovdiv. The house represents one of the best examples of symmetrical style. It was built by master Hadzhi Georgi of Constantinople in 1847. The foundations of the house lie on the ancient Roman wall. The architectural style combines Baroque and native folk motifs in the richly decorated façade, painted black with yellow trim. The undulating pediment copies the line of the "kobilitsa", a curve resembling the yoke for carrying buckets. The large well lit rooms are arranged on either side of the main hall. The front door is placed in the middle of the façade. Upstairs lies a visual feast to the eye. Note the exquisitely carved wooden ceilings, particularly the rosette-and-sunburst ceiling of the grand reception hall.

After being used for some time as a tobacco store house, the building was restored in 1950 and turned into an Ethnographic Museum. The museum contains a number of interesting reproductions of old craftsmen's workshops, an attar of roses distillery, wool spinning and weaving apparatus, and agricultural implements. There is a

striking display of national costumes of the Plovdiv region and the Rhodope mountains, and a rich and varied collection of the jewellery worn by the wives of rich merchants - earrings, necklaces, rings, bracelets, and especially belts. Particularly lovely are the gem-encrusted silver belt clasps. A splendid oil painting of Plovdiv's street life during the 19th century can be seen on the first floor. Three rooms have been furnished with articles of the period: a living room of a poor family; a living room of a craftsman; and a reception room of a rich merchant whose furniture and other objects were brought from Western Europe. At the entrance of the museum is a model of the Kurshum Han, a great storehouse built in the 16th century to store goods which formed part of the flourishing trade between East and West. During June and September, chamber music can be heard in the courtyard. It's an international festival with illustrious performers taking part such as Svyatoslav Richter, David Oistrach, Alexis Weissenberg and many others.

At the end of Chomakov Street lie the ruins of Nesez Tepe Citadel. Although it is difficult to discern precise historical features the site is archaeologically rich. Fortified by the Thracian Obrysaë tribe as early as the fifth century BC, the hilltop and the settlement of Eumolpius, below, were the beginnings of modern Plovdiv. Over the following centuries, the inhabitants must have often resorted to the secret tunnel linking Nebet Tepe with the river bank, as the town and the fortress were sacked by Romans, Slavs, Bulgars, Byzantium and the Ottoman Empire, to name but a few.

Downhill from Chomakov Street is the Hissar gate - the gate of a former fortress which has been rebuilt countless times since Philip of Macedon had it erected. Nearby is the Georgiadi House which houses the Museum of National Liberation: The architecture of the building is far more remarkable than its ornamentation - the architect has combined "box" oriels with bay windows on a great scale. Originally built for a rich Turk in 1846-48, the house contains a gallery where musicians once played and various rooms now occupied by the museum exhibition. Pride of place is given to replicas of the bell that tolled and the cannon that fired during the April rising, when the Turks covered the Plovdiv streets with corpses that the population was forbidden to

bury.

The next door Nedkovich House is renowned for the wood-carved ceiling of the enormous first floor hall, which contains another collection of 19th century furnishings. The house itself, built in 1855, is remarkable for its rich ornamentation in the style of the period. It has a beautiful façade with three arches supported on graceful stone columns

In the near vicinity is the Church of St Nedelya which looks particularly unobtrusive. A three-aisled basilica it is said to contain a delicately carved wooden iconostasis and bishop's throne but unfortunately the structure needs restoration.

The Mavrudi house is a large buff-coloured building with dozens of windows and sturdy beams supporting the oriels. Popularly referred to as the Lamartine House after the French poet who stayed here in 1833, writing Voyage in the Orient and recovering from the cholera that killed his daughter in Constantinople, it now contains a small museum. There are a few pictures of the poet and of the places he had visited on his travels, accompanied by a few lines of appropriate text, and it is really worth visiting the house even only to admire the unusual circular lounge of the house itself. All the material associated with the poet is sent from France. This includes facsimile of pages from the book, photographs of the poet and a facsimile of the poet's birth certificate and so on.

The Roman theatre also known as the Antique Theatre is situated on the southeastern slopes of the group of three hills which form the Old Town. The natural incline of the place was skilfully used to arrange the marble benches of the amphitheatre directly on the rock. Twenty out of a total of 28 rows of benches have been well preserved. The rows are separated into sectors by staircase aisles. The theatre seats 3500 and there are three gates for the public with the central one leading straight to the upper rows of benches. But the greatest architectural skills seem to be concentrated on the stage which is in two levels with an elevated podium. Its façade features colonnades 5 m high. The lower floor is in the Roman-Ionian style, the upper one is Roman-Corinthian. The podium rises above an in-built colonnade with Roman capitals. Marble statues complete the decoration. An inscription carved

on the stage indicates that the theatre was built in Emperor Trayan's time, early in the 2nd c.AD. The façade thus formed is reminiscent of ancient palaces and temples, and it served in fact as permanent decor for the plays that were staged.

The builders apparently followed the pattern of Roman theatres but made some deviations after models from Asia Minor. This fact is indicative of the creative spirit of the Thracian builders and of the local traditions of architecture and building crafts.

Classical plays are staged here during May, June and September.

The theatre, like the residential districts below, was devastated by the Goths in 251, and later used as building material when the town revived.

At the point where the tunnel enters the hill stands the Church of St Marina; a three-aisled basilica which was built in 1853. The roof of the central aisle is supported by 14 columns, the iconostasis, the pulpit and the bishop's throne are beautifully carved by an unknown master of the Debur school. There are some icons by Stanislav Dospevski, the finest being the Nativity.

The ceiling of the colonnade is painted with scenes from the Old Testament. The belfry which stands apart was built in 1870.

The murals are boldly coloured and devils, storks and other creatures peep out from the wooden foliage of its intricate iconostasis.

# **DESTINATION: BULGARIA**

This book contains comprised information about Bulgaria — geographical data, historical background, sights and beauty spots, major cities and resorts, and is intended for English speaking guides and all those engaged in the tourist industry who have a good command of English.

We are convinced that this book can be of good help to those who wish to improve and enrich their knowledge of English.

It is for those whose interests extend further than the somewhat more restricted everyday use of English and is meant to provide more comprehensive vocabulary learners of English need to express ideas and facts on a variety of topics concerning Bulgaria, its land and its people.

We cherish the hope that this book will also find its way to foreign tourists whose destination is Bulgaria as we believe that, thanks to its own merits, it will be appreciated as a generous companion which, by describing the past will throw sufficient light on the present of a country of eventful history.

ISBN 954-8371-49-9

7900.- лв.

**Selecta**